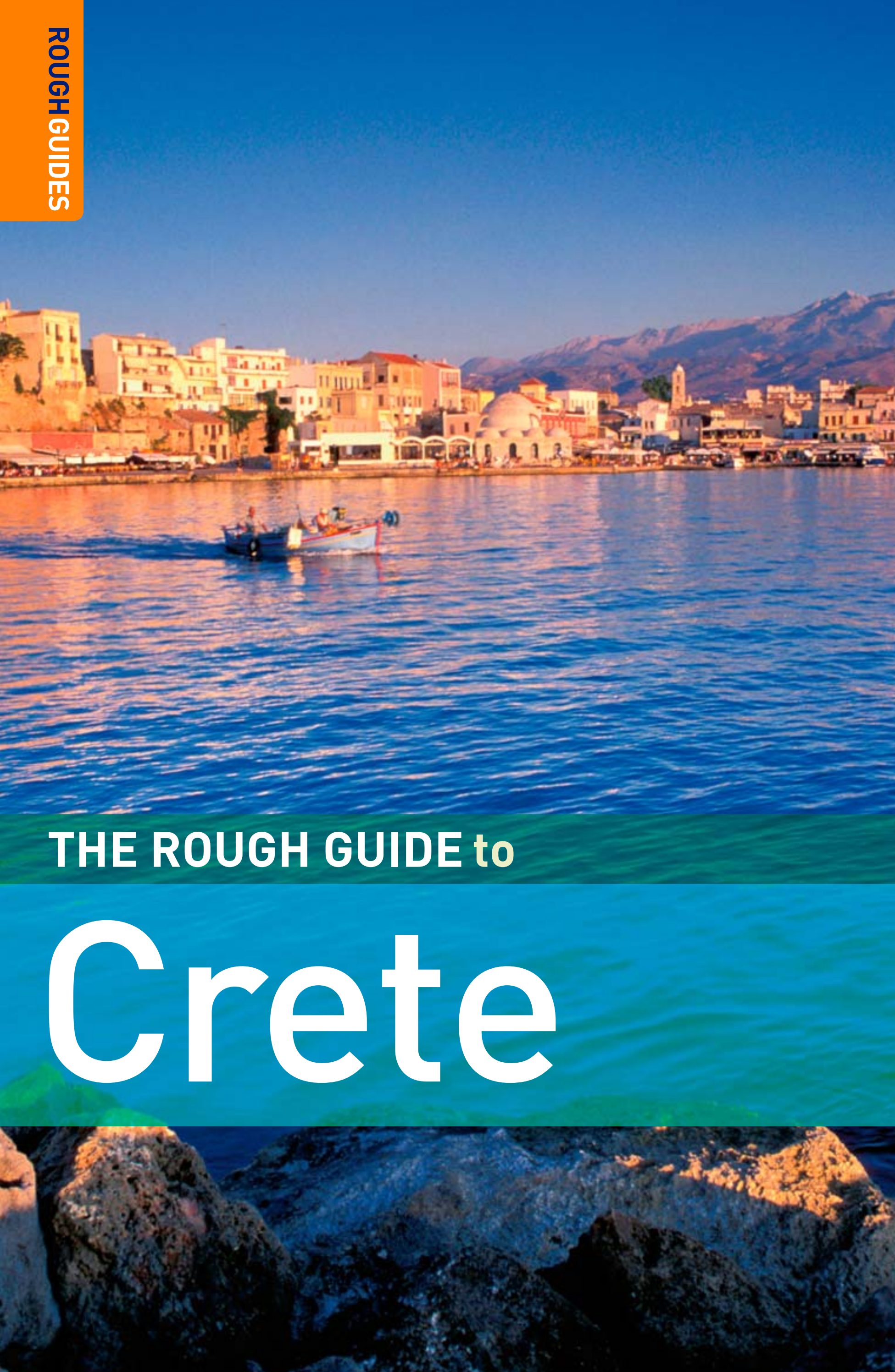

ROUGH GUIDES

THE ROUGH GUIDE to
Crete

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.com

About the authors

John Fisher was one of the authors of the first ever Rough Guide – to Greece – in 1981, and has been inextricably involved with the series and with Crete ever since. The author of several other Rough Guide titles, John lives in south London with his wife and two sons.

Geoff Garvey first came to Crete as a student of ancient history and progressed from his study of the Minoans to develop a great affection both for the island and its people. His favourite activities when not working on the next update include seeking out obscure Minoan sites and remote Byzantine chapels. When away from the island he lives in a Spanish mountain village and is co-author of the *Rough Guide to Andalucía*.

Author Picks

Throughout this book, we've used the Rough Guides icon to highlight establishments our authors particularly recommend – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant. Each has been sent a "Recommended by Rough Guides" display sticker. The same icon is also used to flag up book recommendations in the Contexts section. Please send us your own nominations, which our authors will be happy to check for future editions.

Accommodation price codes

Throughout the book we've categorized accommodation according to the following price codes, which denote the cheapest available double room in high season. For apartments and villas, the price code refers to the price of the whole apartment, not just to a double room within the apartment.

① €25 and under
② €26–35
③ €36–45
④ €46–55
⑤ €56–65
⑥ €66–75
⑦ €76–110
⑧ €111–150
⑨ Over €150

Front cover image: Fishing boat, Haniá © Alamy
Back cover image: Knossos, fresco © Alamy
Right: Ancient tree © Rough Guides

The **Rough Guide** to

Crete

written and researched by

John Fisher and Geoff Garvey

ROUGH GUIDES

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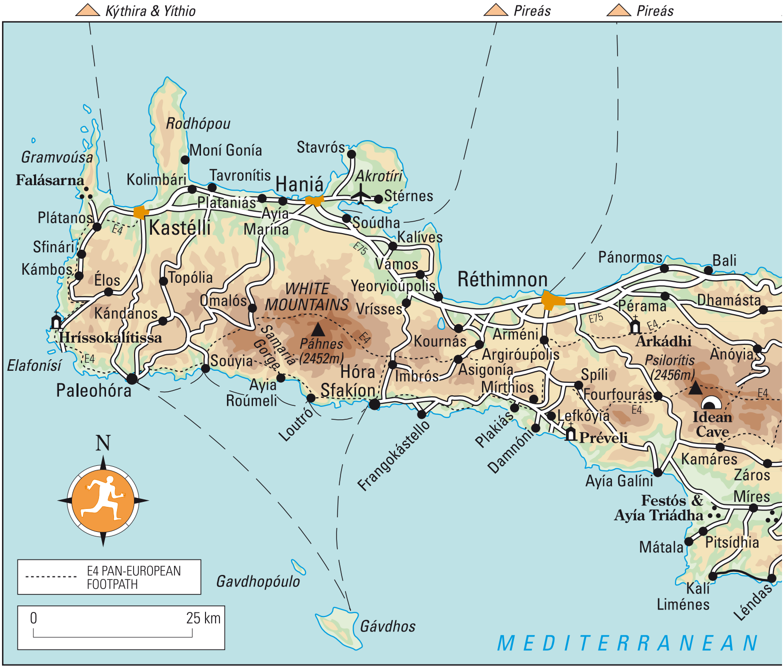
◄◄ Hilltop chapel, Iráklion province ◄ Sunbathing, Falásarna beach

Introduction to

Crete

Crete is a great deal more than just another Greek island. Much of the time, especially in the cities or along the developed north coast, it doesn't feel like an island at all, but a substantial land in its own right. Which of course it is – a mountainous, wealthy and at times surprisingly cosmopolitan one with a tremendous and unique history. There are two big cities, Iráklion and Haniá, a host of sizeable, historic towns, and an island culture which is uniquely Cretan: the Turks were in occupation little over a hundred years ago, and the Greek flag was raised for the first time only in 1913.


Kýthira & Yíthio
Pireás
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Gramvoúsa
Falásarna
Moní Gonía
Stavrós
Kolimbári
Tavronítis
Haniá
Akrotíri
Stérnes
Plátanos
Plataniás
Ayía Marína
Soúdha
Kastélli
E4
Kalíves
Sfinári
E75
Vámos
Kámbos
Élos
Topólia
Yeoryioúpolis
Réthimnon
Pánormos
Bali
Omalós
WHITE MOUNTAINS
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E75
E4
Hríssokalítissa
Samariá Gorge
E4
Páhnes (2452m)
Kournás
Arméni
Arkádhi
Argiroúpolis
Anóyia
Elafonísi
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Soúyia
Hóra Sfakíon
Ímbros
Asigonía
Psilorítis (2456m)
Spíli
Paleohóra
Ayia Roúmeli
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Idean Cave
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Kamáres
Ayía Galíni
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Festós & Ayía Triádha
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E4 PAN-EUROPEAN FOOTPATH
Gavdhopóulo
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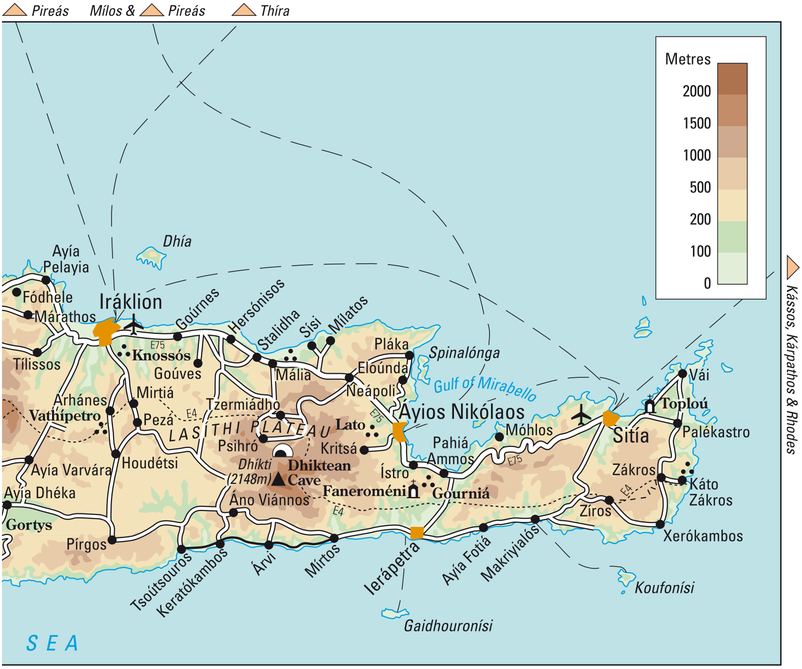
Gávdhos
MEDITERRANEAN

Long before, Crete was distinguished as the home of Europe's earliest civilization. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the legends of King Minos, and of a Cretan society that ruled the Greek world in prehistory, were confirmed by excavations at Knossós and Festós. Yet the **Minoans** had a remarkably advanced and cultured society, at the centre of a substantial maritime trading empire, as early as 2000 BC. The artworks produced on Crete at this time are unsurpassed anywhere in the ancient world, and it seems clear, wandering through the Minoan palaces and towns, that life on Crete in those days was good. The apparently peaceful Minoan culture survived a number of major disasters, following each of which the palaces were rebuilt on an even grander scale. It is only after a third catastrophe that significant numbers of weapons start to appear in the ruins, probably because Mycenean Greeks had taken control of the island. Nevertheless, for nearly five hundred years, by far the longest period of peace the island has seen, Crete was home to a civilization well ahead of its time.


Pireás
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Kássos, Kárpathos & Rhodes
Dhía
Ayía Pelayia
Fódhele
Márathos
Iráklion
Goúrnes
Hersónisos
Stalídha
Sísi
Mílatos
Tílissos
E75
Knossós
Goúves
Mália
Pláka
Spinalónga
Eloúnda
Neápoli
Gulf of Mirabello
Arhánes
Vathípetro
Mirtiá
Pezá
E4
Tzermiádho
LASITHI PLATEAU
Lato
E75
Áyios Nikólaos
Móhlos
Vái
Toploú
Sitía
Palékastro
Psihró
Kritsá
Pahiá Ammos
E75
Ayía Varvára
Houdétsi
Dhíkti (2148m)
Dhiktean Cave
Ístro
Zákros
Ayia Dhéka
Áno Viánnos
Faneroméni
Gourniá
Káto Zákros
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Zíros
Gortys
Pírgos
Xerókambos
Tsoútsouros
Kerátokambos
Árvi
Mírtos
Ierápetra
Ayía Fotiá
Makriyialós
Koufonísi
Gaidhouronísi
SEA

Buying sponges, Iráklion harbour

The Minoans are believed to have come originally from Anatolia, and the island's position as meeting point – and strategic fulcrum – between east and west has played a crucial role in its **subsequent history**. Control passed from Greeks to Romans to Saracens, through the Byzantine Empire to Venice, and finally to Turkey for two hundred years. During World War II Crete was occupied by the Germans and gained the dubious distinction of being the first place to be successfully invaded by parachute. Each one of these diverse rulers has left some mark, and more importantly they have marked the islanders and forged for the land a personality toughened by endless struggles for independence.

> **Crete's mystery is extremely deep. Whoever sets foot on this island senses a mysterious force branching warmly and beneficiently through his veins, senses his soul begin to grow.**
>
> Níkos Kazantzakís, *Report to Greco*

Today, with a flourishing agricultural economy, Crete is one of the few Greek islands that could support itself without tourists. Nevertheless, tourism is heavily promoted and is rapidly taking over parts of the island altogether. Along the populous **north coast**, Crete can be as sophisticated as you want it, and the northeast, in particular, can be depressingly overdeveloped. In the less known coastal reaches of the **south** it's still possible to find yourself alone, but even here places which have not yet been reached are getting harder and harder to find. By contrast, the high mountains of the interior are barely touched, and one of the best things to do on Crete is to hire a vehicle and head for remoter villages, often only a few kilometres off some heavily beaten track.

The **mountains**, which dominate the view as you approach and make all but the shortest journey inland an expedition, are perhaps the most rewarding aspect of Crete. In the west, the White Mountains are snowcapped right into June, Psiloritis (Mount Ida) in the centre is higher still, and in the east the heights continue through the Dhíkti and Sitía ranges to form a continuous chain from one end of the island to the other. They make a relatively small place feel much larger: there are still many places where the roads cannot reach.

▶ Orthodox priests

Fact file

- Some 260km long and ranging between 15km and 60km in breadth, Crete is the largest of the Greek islands and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean, with a **land area** of 8300 square kilometres and a population of 550,000.

- Crete is one of Greece's ten administrative regions returning sixteen members to the Greek national parliament. The island is made up of **four provinces** or nomes, with its **capital** at the north coast seaport of **Iráklion** (pop. 130,000). The island's other three provincial capitals – Haniá (pop. 60,000), Réthimnon (pop. 20,000) and Áyios Nikólaos (pop. 7000) – are the focus for local government and cultural activities.

- Agriculture and tourism are the mainstays of the Cretan **economy**. Half the island's territory is devoted to agriculture, with olives, grapes and citrus fruit the main crops, whilst over two million visitors take holidays here each year.

- Crete has attracted **invaders** throughout its history. Europe's first civilization, the Minoans, were the earliest known colonizers, but Myceneans, Dorian Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Venetians, Turks and the Germans in World War II all conquered the island in their turn.

- Crete's dominant **religion** is the Greek Orthodox creed.

Where to go

Every part of Crete has its loyal devotees and it's hard to pick out highlights. On the whole, if you want to get away from it all you should head for the ends of the island – west, towards **Haniá** and the smaller, less well-connected places along the south and west coasts, or east to **Sitía**. Wherever you're staying though, you don't have to go far inland to escape the crowds.

Whatever you do, your first objective will probably be to leave behind the sprawling city of **Iráklion** (Heraklion) – having paid the obligatory, and rewarding, visits to the **archeological museum** and nearby **Knossós**. The **Minoan sites** are of course one of the major attractions of Crete: as well as Knossós itself there are many other grand remains scattered around the centre of the island – **Festós** and **Ayía Triádha** in the south (with Roman **Górtys** to provide contrast) and **Mália** on the north coast. Almost wherever you go though, you'll find some kind of reminder of this history – the Minoan town of **Gourniá** and the Dorian Greek sites of **Drirós** and **Lató** near the tourist enticements of **Áyios Nikólaos**, the palace of **Zákros** over in the far east or Roman **Áptera** and a host of lesser sites scattered around the west.

For many people, unexpected highlights also turn out to be Crete's **Venetian forts** and defensive **walls and bastions** – dominant at **Réthimnon**, **Iráklion** and **Haniá**, magnificent at **Frangokástello**, and found in various stages of ruin around most of the island. **Byzantine churches** and remote

▲ Church of the Panayía Loubiniés, Fódhele

Village Crete

Despite the rapid urban growth in the last fifty years of towns like Hánia, Réthimnon and particularly Iráklion, Crete remains a land rooted in its villages. These villages are the island's pulse, each with its own character and traditions where the pace of the year is determined by the agricultural calendar. In the villages you can still find everyday life lived as it has been for centuries, where potters spin clay into ewers and jars, weavers make rugs in traditional patterns and farmers cart their olives to the local press. At the end of a day the men unwind with a relaxing *rakí* at the local *kafenío* whilst the women prepare the evening meal.

monasteries, many containing stunning medieval **wall paintings**, are Crete's other glories; the most famous frescoes are at **Kritsá** but again they can be discovered almost anywhere, with fine clusters in the south and west of Haniá province. The smaller Cretan **towns**, supply centres for the island's farmers, are always worth visiting for their vibrant markets, shops and tavernas, whilst larger conurbations like **Réthimnon** and **Haniá** are atmospheric, cluttered old places with mysterious corners full of Venetian and Turkish relics.

The mountains and valleys of the interior also deserve far more attention than they get. Only the **Lasíthi** plateau in the east and the **Samariá Gorge** in the west really see large numbers of visitors, but almost anywhere you can turn off the main roads and find agricultural villages going about their daily life, and often astonishingly beautiful scenery. This is especially true in the west, where the Lefká Óri – the **White Mountains** – dramatically dominate every view, and numerous lesser gorges run parallel to Samariá gorge down to the Libyan Sea. But there's lovely country behind Iráklion too, in the foothills

Cretan goats

Goats have been around a long time in Crete and Greece and have even lent their name (*tragos* in ancient Greek) to one of the major forms of drama. This came about because of the ancient Greek ritual of sacrificing a goat to the god of wine, Dionysos, to thank him for the vintage – the goat died because it was the enemy of the vine, and was apt to eat and destroy it. Whatever the ancients thought of them, the goats carried on regardless, and unruly flocks still roam across Cretan hillsides voraciously devouring any green leaf or shoot they find. Long ago, the mountains and hills of Crete were thickly forested with trees that attracted rainfall and held the soil. Erosion caused by centuries of cutting back the woodland, particularly in the Venetian period, has been compounded by the seedling-hungry domestic goat, whose insatiable appetite has turned vast tracts of Crete and Greece into the barren deserts of bare rock they are today – a tragedy indeed.

▲ Village street, Asprós, Hánia province

of the Psiloritis range, and especially on the other side of these mountains in the **Amári Valley**, easily reached from Réthimnon. The east also has its moments, in the **Dhíkti range**, the spectacular cliff-top drive from Áyios Nikólaos to Sitía and the isolated stretch of picturesque coastline lapped by a turquoise sea, to the south of Zákros. Things have been improved for **walkers** in these zones by the upgrading and waymarking of the **E4 Pan-European footpath** (see map), which crosses the island from east to west, taking in some of its most stunning scenery.

As for **beaches**, you'll find great ones almost anywhere on the north coast. From Iráklion to

▲ Méronas, church of the Panayía

Áyios Nikólaos there's very heavy development, and most package tourists are aiming for the resort hotels here. These places can be fun if nightlife and crowds are what you're after – especially the biggest of them, like **Mália**, **Hersónisos** and **Áyios Nikólaos**, which have the added advantage of being large enough to have plenty of cheap food and accommodation, plus good transport links. Mália and Hersónisos also have sand as good as any on the island (if you can find it through the crowds), but Áyios Nikólaos really doesn't have much of a beach of its own. Further east things get quieter: **Sitía** is a place of real character, and beyond it on the east coast are a number of beautifully tranquil places – especially **Zákros** and **Kserókambos** – although in high summer the beautiful palm beach at **Vái** gets incredibly crowded with day-trippers. To the west there's another tranche of development around **Réthimnon**, but the town itself is relatively unscathed, and there's a rather lesser cluster of apartments and smaller hotels near **Haniá**, the most attractive of the bigger towns. Other places at this end of the island tend to be on a smaller scale.

Along the **south coast**, resorts are far more scattered, and the mountains come straight down to the sea much of the way along. Only a handful of places are really developed – **Ierápetra**, **Ayía Galíni**, **Mátala**, **Paleohóra** – and a few more, like **Plakiás** and **Makriyialós**, on their way. But lesser spots in between, not always easy to get to, are some of the most attractive in Crete.

When to go

As the southernmost of all Greek islands, Crete has by far the longest summers: you can get a decent tan here right into October and swim at least from April until early November. **Spring** is the prime time to come: in April and May the island is relatively empty of visitors, the weather clear and not overpoweringly hot, and every scene is brightened by a profusion of wild flowers.

By mid-June the rush is beginning. **July** and **August** are not only the hottest, the most crowded and most expensive months, they are also intermittently blighted by fierce winds and accompanying high seas, which make boat trips very uncomfortable, and at their worst can mean staying indoors for a day or more at a time. The south coast is particularly prone to these. In September the crowds gradually begin to thin out, and **autumn** can again be a great time to visit – but now the landscape looks parched and tired, and there's a feeling of things gradually winding down.

Winters are mild, but also vaguely depressing: many things are shut, it can rain sporadically, sometimes for days, and there's far less life in the streets. In the mountains it snows, even to the extent where villages can be cut off; on the south coast it's generally warmer, soothed by a breeze from Africa. You may get a week or more of really fine weather in the middle of winter, but equally you can have sudden viciously cold snaps right through into March.

Average temperatures and rainfall

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Avg. daytime	°C	12	12	14	17	21	23	25	26	25	21	18	14
temperature	°F	52	52	57	62	70	74	77	79	77	70	64	57
Avg. water	°C	15	15	16	17	20	23	24	25	24	23	19	17
temperature	°F	59	59	61	62	68	74	75	77	75	74	66	62
Avg. rainfall	mm	14	11	8	6	3	1	0	0	2	6	8	12

30

things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Crete has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective and subjective taste of the island's highlights: from world-famous acheological sites to stunning mountains and gorges, lively resorts and great beaches. They're arranged in five colour-coded categories to help you find the very best things to see, do and experience. All highlights have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.

01 **Áyios Nikólaos** Page **175** • Overlooking twin harbours from its hillside setting, this is one of the island's most picturesque towns.

02 Paleohóra Page **386** • The major resort of southwest Crete, Paleohóra has fine beaches and bags of laid-back charm.

03 Markets Page **312** • The colourful markets of Haniá and Iráklion sell everything from Cretan cheese, honey and herbs to baskets, bags and traditional leather boots.

04 Iráklion Page **77** • Crete's capital offers a host of monuments, museums and churches, all within easy walking distance of the elegant Venetian Morosini fountain.

05

Archeological Museum, Iráklion Page **90** • Crete's major museum reveals the world's finest collection of Minoan frescoes, jewellery, ceramics and sculpture.

06

Vái beach Page **204** • This shimmering white-sand beach is fringed with exotic palm trees, claimed to be Europe's only wild date-palm grove.

07

Traditional weaving Page **170** • The handloom weavers of the Lásithi Plateau, Kritsá and Anóyia are renowned for their carpets and rugs.

08 **Isolated beaches** Page **376** • While Crete has its share of brash and boisterous resorts, for escapists there are scores of superb beaches such as Falásarna where it's possible to leave the crowds behind.

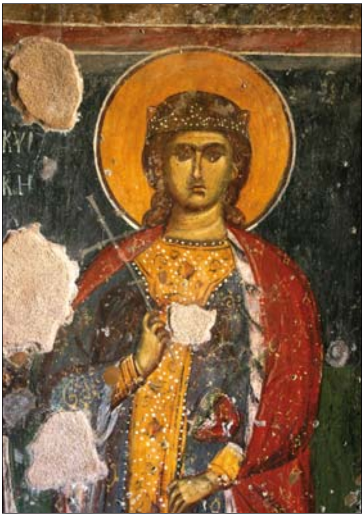
09 **Moní Arkádhi** Page **248** • Crete's most celebrated monastery with its fine Venetian church is an emblem of the island's struggle for independence.

10 **Haniá** Page **298** • Wander the streets of Haniá's old town, to discover its beautiful harbour and haunting vestiges of the Minoan, Venetian and Ottoman past.

11 Margarítes potters' village Page **258** • Carrying on an island tradition thousands of years old, the potters of Margarítes turn out a variety of ceramic wares from egg cups and vases to giant *píthoi*.

12 Svendóni Cave Page **262** • The awesome Svendóni Cave is only one of thousands of caves and potholes dotted around the island, many of which can be visited.

13 Sitía Page **196** • Set around a beautiful bay, one of the island's most easy-going towns makes an excellent base for touring the east.



14 **Byzantine frescoes** Page **185** • Some of the finest Byzantine frescoes in Greece are to be found in Crete's country churches, the most famous of which is the Panayía Kirá in Kritsá.

15 **Elafonísi** Page **384** • A turquoise sea, rose-tinted sands and shallow, warm waters make this coral reef lagoon one of Crete's most exotic locations.

16 **Réthimnon** Page **237** • Dominated by its magnificent Venetian fortress, elegant Réthimnon has plenty of museums, monuments and nightlife plus a fine beach.

17 **Lyra music** Page **464** • The three stringed *lyra* is Crete's "national instrument" – no baptism party, wedding feast or celebration is complete without its accompaniment.

18 Samariá Gorge Page **347** • Europe's longest gorge is a spectacular natural wonder, a magnet for trekkers and is only one of numerous scenic gorges on the island that can be hiked from end to end.

19 **Kourémenos beach** Page **207** • At the island's eastern tip, this is Crete's major windsurfing location.

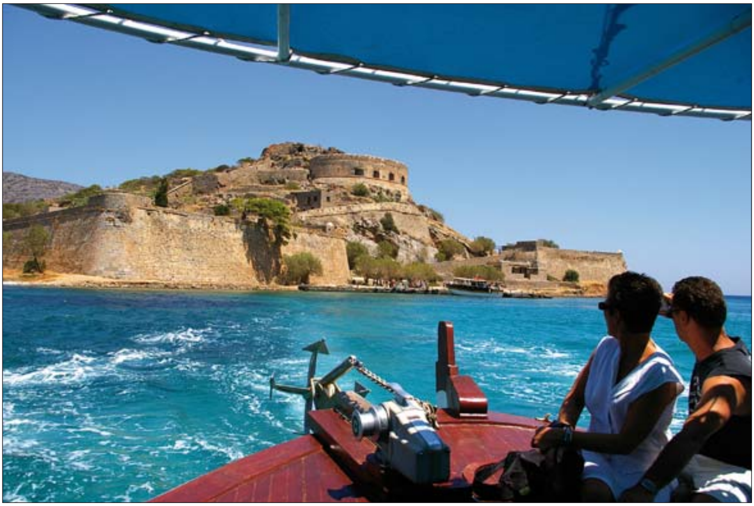
20 **Wine** Page **113** • Wine has been made on Crete for thousands of years and the vineyards of Pezá produce some of the island's finest wines.

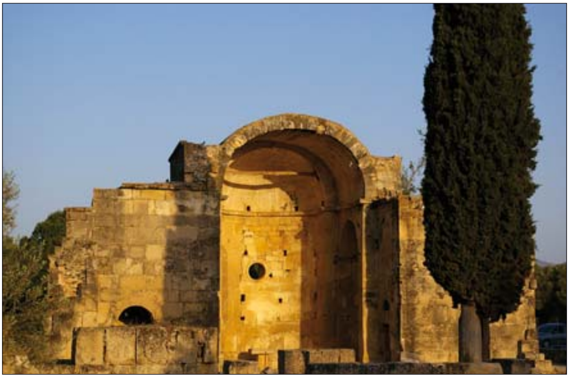
21 The kafenío

Page **51** • A focal point of Cretan life, the *kafenío* is a great place for lively discussions or playing *távli* (backgammon) whilst downing a coffee, ouzo or (as here) a fiery *raki*.

22 Spinalónga

Page **184** • A visit to the forbidding islet of Spinalónga makes for a memorable excursion – once an impregnable Venetian fortress, it later served as a leper colony, the last of its kind in Europe.





23 Górtys

Page **138**

• The enormous basilica of Áyios Títos stands at the centre of the island's most extensive Greco-Roman city.

24 Lasíthi Plateau

Page **170** • This fertile mountain plateau is famed for its traditional windmills but is also the place to see a riot of springtime wildflowers and soaring eagles and vultures.

25 Loutró

Page **354** • Reachable only by boat or on foot, this tiny idyllic retreat on the edge of its own bay is the perfect place to get away from it all.

26 Mátala

Page **148** • Explore ancient burial caves cut into the cliffs overlooking Mátala's fabulous beach, also famed for its spectacular crimson sunsets.

27 Knossós

Page **102** • Crete's biggest attraction, this remarkable 3500-year-old Minoan palace – the legendary seat of King Minos – is a sprawling maze of royal chambers, grand staircases, storerooms and workshops.

28 Fortresses

Page **86** • The bastion guarding the harbour at Iráklion is only one of a score of Venetian and Turkish fortresses to be seen all over the island.

29 Fish and seafood

Page **50** • Crete is a wonderful place for dining on fish and seafood, freshly landed from the hundreds of fishing boats that bring in the catch.

30 **Country churches** Page **117** •Ancient chapels and churches in stunning locations are a Cretan speciality; the church of the Panayía at Fódhele is a fine example.

Basics

Basics

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Getting there

By far the easiest way to get to Crete is to fly. The vast majority of visitors are northern Europeans doing just that, on package tours that include a direct charter flight. Many of these charter companies sell flight-only tickets on their planes, and there are a limited number of direct scheduled flights too. Overland routes are long, tortuous and expensive, so we've included only the briefest details here.

Even if your starting point is North America, Australia or New Zealand, the most cost-effective way to reach Crete may well be to get to London – or Amsterdam or one of many other northern European cities – and pick up an onward flight from there. The chief disadvantage of direct flights to Crete is a lack of flexibility; most companies have only one or two flights a week, and although it is increasingly easy to book single flights (so that you can fly in with one operator and leave with another), many charter companies still charge a significant premium for this. For greater flexibility, you may have to fly to Athens and take a domestic flight or the ferry from there; see p.35 for full details.

Airfares depend on the season, with the highest in July, August and during Easter week. But May, June and September are also popular, and since far fewer flights operate through the winter, bargains are rare at any time.

There are two main **airports**, at **Iráklion** (Heraklion) for the centre and east of the island and at **Haniá** (Chania) for the west. Only Iráklion has any scheduled international flights, but both have regular charters from across Europe, and numerous daily flights from Athens. Charters to Haniá tend to be harder to come by and slightly more expensive, but it's normally a less chaotic arrival point. **Sitía** in the far east also has regular flights from Athens plus the occasional international charter.

When buying flights it always pays to **shop around** and to bear in mind that many travel websites don't include charters or budget airlines (such as *easyJet*) in their searches. Even if you don't end up buying your ticket online, it's worth checking out a few of the general travel websites below (as well as the airlines' own) to get an idea of what the going rates are. Be aware too that a **package deal**, with accommodation included, can sometimes be as cheap as, or even cheaper than, a flight alone: there's no rule that says you have to use your accommodation every night you're in Crete, or even at all. If you are under 26, or a full-time student, or over 60, you may well be eligible for special **student/youth or senior fares**, so it's worth asking about these.

Overland alternatives from the UK or northern Europe involve three to four days of nonstop travel. If you want to take your time over the journey, then driving or taking the train can be enjoyable, although invariably far more expensive than flying. Once in Greece, of course, you still have to negotiate the crossing to Crete (see p.35 for details).

Online booking agents and general travel sites

ⓦ **www.charterflights.co.uk** (bookings from UK & Ireland). Excellent listings of charter flights from airports throughout the UK and Ireland.

ⓦ **www.cheapflights.co.uk** (bookings from UK & Ireland; from the US ⓦ www.cheapflights.com; from Canada ⓦ www.cheapflights.ca; from Australia & New Zealand ⓦ www.cheapflights.com.au). No direct booking, but lists flights and offers from dozens of operators, with web links to most.

ⓦ **www.ebookers.com** (from UK; from Ireland ⓦ www.ebookers.ie, and local sites for other European countries). Efficient, easy-to-use flight finder; scheduled flights only.

ⓦ **www.expedia.co.uk** (bookings from UK & Ireland; from the US ⓦ www.expedia.com; from Canada ⓦ www.expedia.ca). Discount airfares, all-airline search engine and daily deals.

ⓦ **www.lastminute.com** (from UK; from the US

Ⓦ www.us.lastminute.com; from Ireland Ⓦ www.lastminute.ie; from Australia Ⓦ www.lastminute.com.au; from New Zealand Ⓦ www.lastminute.co.nz). Good holiday-package and flight-only deals available at very short notice.

Ⓦ www.opodo.co.uk Popular and reliable source of UK airfares. Owned by, and run in conjunction with, nine major European airlines.

Ⓦ www.priceline.com (US). Name-your-own-price auction website that has deals at around forty percent off standard fares. Be sure to check the terms before bidding.

Ⓦ www.skyauction.com Bookings from the US only. Auctions tickets and travel packages to destinations worldwide, as well as a regular flight and holiday search.

Ⓦ www.travel.com.au (bookings from Australia; from New Zealand Ⓦ www.travel.co.nz). Comprehensive online travel sites, with discounted fares.

Ⓦ www.travelocity.co.uk (bookings from UK & Ireland; from the US Ⓦ www.travelocity.com; from Canada Ⓦ www.travelocity.ca). Destination guides, hot Web fares and deals for car rental, accommodation and lodging as well as fares.

Ⓦ www.zuji.com.au (bookings from Australia; from New Zealand Ⓦ www.zuji.co.nz). Good general travel website: flights, hotels, car rental and more.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

In the age of the low-cost airline, flights to Crete can seem pricey: the minimum, even if you book well in advance, is around £150

Fly less – stay longer! Travel and climate change

Climate change is the single biggest issue facing our planet. It is caused by a build-up in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which are emitted by many sources – including planes. Already, flights account for around 3–4 percent of human-induced global warming: that figure may sound small, but it is rising year on year and threatens to counteract the progress made by reducing greenhouse emissions in other areas.

Rough Guides regard travel, overall, as a global benefit, and feel strongly that the advantages to developing economies are important, as are the opportunities for greater contact and awareness among peoples. But we all have a responsibility to limit our personal "carbon footprint". That means giving thought to how often we fly and what we can do to redress the harm that our trips create.

Flying and climate change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO_2, but planes are particularly bad offenders, releasing large volumes of greenhouse gases at altitudes where their impact is far more harmful. Flying also allows us to travel much further than we would contemplate doing by road or rail, so the emissions attributable to each passenger become truly shocking. For example, one person taking a return flight between Europe and California produces the equivalent impact of 2.5 tonnes of CO_2 – similar to the yearly output of the average UK car.

Less harmful planes may evolve but it will be decades before they replace the current fleet – which could be too late for avoiding climate chaos. In the meantime, there are limited options for concerned travellers: to reduce the amount we travel by air (take fewer trips, stay longer!), to avoid night flights (when plane contrails trap heat from Earth but can't reflect sunlight back to space), and to make the trips we do take "climate neutral" via a carbon offset scheme.

Carbon offset schemes

Offset schemes run by **climatecare.org**, **carbonneutral.com** and others allow you to "neutralize" the greenhouse gases that you are responsible for releasing. Their websites have simple calculators that let you work out the impact of any flight. Once that's done, you can pay to fund projects that will reduce future carbon emissions by an equivalent amount (such as the distribution of low-energy light bulbs and cooking stoves in developing countries). Please take the time to visit our website and make your trip climate neutral.

Ⓦ www.roughguides.com/climatechange

return from London, and you can pay well over twice that if you book late for the high season. In fairness, it may be further than you think: London to Iráklion is close to a four-hour flight. British Airways **scheduled flights** from Gatwick (daily through the summer) and Manchester (twice-weekly) to Iráklion are surprisingly often the cheapest option for a flight-only deal, at least if you book well in advance. **Charters** generally start at around £200 return from the London airports, and most of the operators now offer flight-only deals, often allowing you to book one way only, either through their own websites or through package and specialist operators. There are direct charters from Dublin too, as well as from numerous UK regional airports through the summer, with prices generally somewhat higher (rarely less than €400 from Dublin). Remember that packages may cost little more than this, and if you're booking at the last minute can even cost less than the flight alone.

If you can't find a direct flight, want more flexibility or are travelling out of season, consider travelling **via Athens** (some flights are also routed via Thessaloníki), with a domestic flight or ferry from there to Crete. British Airways and Olympic each have several daily flights from Heathrow to Athens, and easyJet flies daily from Luton and Gatwick. Olympic has the advantage of direct connections to its own domestic flights, but is notorious for long delays and in permanent financial difficulty. The only other scheduled direct flight from the UK is Air Scotland's weekly service (summer only) from Glasgow to Athens. From Dublin, Aer Lingus has three direct flights a week from June to September. At other times of year, or from any other regional airport in the UK or Ireland, you'll have to stop en route to Athens, in London or elsewhere. It can pay to think laterally here: one of the best routings from Dublin, for example, is on Malev Hungarian airlines via Budapest – with good prices and convenient connections. See p.35 for details of Athens and onward transport to Crete.

Charter airlines and package companies

Avro ⓣ0871 622 4476, ⓦwww.avro.co.uk. Flights from Gatwick, Birmingham and Manchester.

Excel Airways ⓣ0870 320 7777, ⓦwww.excelairways.com or ⓦwww.freedomflights.co.uk. Frequent flights from numerous UK regional airports, plus some packages.

First Choice ⓣ0870 350 3999, ⓦwww.firstchoice.co.uk. Package holidays and frequent flights from numerous UK regional airports.

MyTravel ⓣ0870 350 3999, ⓦwww.mytravel.com, ⓦwww.panoramaholidays.ie from Ireland. Flights and packages from numerous UK regional airports, plus Dublin to Iráklion.

Thomas Cook ⓣ0870 750 5711, ⓦwww.thomascook.com, ⓦwww.flythomascook.com. Frequent flights and packages from numerous UK regional airports.

Thomson ⓣ0870 165 0079, ⓣ0800 000 747 (flights), ⓦwww.thomson.co.uk, ⓦwww.thomsonfly.com. The biggest charter and package operator from the UK, serving numerous regional airports.

Scheduled airlines

Aegean Airways ⓦwww.aegeanair.com. Domestic flights, Athens to Crete.

Aer Lingus Republic of Ireland ⓣ0818 365 000, ⓦwww.aerlingus.com.

Air Scotland UK ⓣ0141/222-2363, ⓦwww.air-scotland.com.

bmi UK ⓣ0870 607 0555, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/407 3036, ⓦwww.flybmi.com.

bmibaby UK ⓣ0870 224 0224, Republic of Ireland ⓣ1890/340 122, ⓦwww.bmibaby.com.

British Airways UK ⓣ0870 850 9850, Republic of Ireland ⓣ1890 626 747, ⓦwww.ba.com.

easyJet UK ⓣ0905/821 0905, ⓦwww.easyjet.com.

Malev Hungarian Airlines Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/844 4303, ⓦwww.malev.hu.

Olympic Airways UK ⓣ0870 606 0460, ⓦwww.olympicairlines.com.

Ryanair UK ⓣ0871 246 0000, Republic of Ireland ⓣ0818 303 030, ⓦwww.ryanair.com.

Flight and travel agents

Aran Travel International Galway ⓣ091/562595. Good-value flights to all parts of the world.

Argo ⓣ0870 066 7070, ⓦwww.argo-holidays.com. Long-established Greek specialist for upmarket holidays and good flight-only deals.

North South Travel ⓣ01245/608291, ⓦwww.northsouthtravel.co.uk. Friendly, competitive travel agency, offering discounted fares worldwide – profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Rosetta Travel Belfast ⓣ028/9064 4996, ⓦwww.rosettatravel.com. Flight and holiday agent, specializing in deals direct from Belfast.

STA Travel ⓣ0870 163 0026, ⓦwww.statravel.co.uk. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail passes, and more. Good discounts for students and under-26s. A dozen branches across England, especially on or near university campuses.

Packages and tours

Virtually every major British **tour operator** includes Crete in its programme, though with many of the mainstream outfits choices are limited to the established resorts in the north-east. If you buy one of these at a last-minute discount, especially in spring or autumn, you may find it costs little more than a flight – and you can use the accommodation included as much or as little as you want.

For a more low-key and genuinely local resort, however, it's better to book your holiday through one of the **specialist agencies** listed below. Most of these are fairly small-scale operations, providing competitively priced packages and often more traditional village-based accommodation. They also make an effort to get to out-of-the-way places. Such agencies tend to divide into two types: those that, like the major chains (some are subsidiaries of them), contract a block of accommodation and flight seats for a full season, and an increasing number of bespoke agencies that tailor holidays at your request, making all transport and accommodation arrangements on the spot. These can work out somewhat more expensive, but the quality of flights and lodging is often correspondingly higher, and you'll also have the option of two-centre or multi-centre holidays.

There are also a number of specialist operators offering **walking** or **nature holidays** – usually small groups of ten to fifteen people plus an experienced guide, sometimes following a self-guided itinerary with arranged accommodation each day – or other special interests such as **photography** or **yoga**.

Hotel, villa or village accommodation holidays

Cachet Travel ⓣ020/8847 8700, ⓦwww.cachet-travel.co.uk. Attractive range of villas and apartments, mainly in the south and west.

CV Travel ⓣ0870 787 9712, ⓦwww.cvtravel.co.uk. Upmarket villas in Eloúnda and Áyios Nikólaos.

Freedom of Greece ⓣ0870 220 1200, ⓦwww.freedomofgreece.com. Wide range of apartments and villas right across Crete, including plenty of budget options. Accommodation only, or with flight.

Freelance Holidays ⓣ01789/297705, ⓦwww.freelance-holidays.co.uk. Good-value apartment and villa holidays across Crete, mostly in the west.

Greek Islands Club ⓣ020/8232 9780, ⓦwww.greekislandsclub.com. Part of Sunvil (see below), specialising in upmarket villas with private pools.

Hidden Greece ⓣ020/7839 2553, ⓦwww.hidden-greece.co.uk. Specialist agent putting together tailor-made packages to smaller destinations at reasonable prices.

Inntravel ⓣ01653/617755, ⓦwww.inntravel.co.uk. Packages to a limited range of top-quality, interesting hotels and villas, which can be included in tailor-made, two-centre and walking holidays.

Planet Holidays ⓣ0871 871 2234, ⓦwww.planet-holidays.net. Specialises in four- and five-star hotels.

Pure Crete ⓣ020/8760 0879, ⓦwww.pure-crete.com. Characterful, converted cottages and farmhouses in western Crete, plus walking, wildlife and other special-interest trips.

Simply Crete ⓣ0870 166 4979, ⓦwww.simplytravel.co.uk. Although now part of the vast TUI organisation, Simply Crete still manages a personal touch, and has plenty of excellent, upmarket accommodation across the island.

Simpson Travel ⓣ0845 611 6502, ⓦwww.simpsontravel.com. Graham Simpson founded Simply Crete: his new company offers exclusive, classy hotels, houses and villas across Crete.

Sunvil Holidays ⓣ020/8758 4758, ⓦwww.sunvil.co.uk/greece. High-quality outfit specializing in upmarket hotels and apartments.

Travel Club of Upminster ⓣ01708/225000, ⓦwww.travelclubofupminster.co.uk. Relatively small operator with a long history in Crete and an excellent reputation. Apartment and hotel holidays in the west.

Walking, nature and special interest holidays

ATG Oxford ⓣ01865/315678, ⓦwww.atg-oxford.co.uk. Somewhat pricey but high-standard guided walks in the far west.

Exodus ⓣ0870 240 5550, ⓦwww.exodus.co.uk. One-week treks through the White Mountains.

Explore Worldwide ⓣ01252/760 000, ⓦwww.exploreworldwide.com. Walking trips, including an option to return round the island by boat.

Free Spirit Travel ⓣ01273/564230, ⓦwww

.freespirituk.com. Yoga holidays in western Crete, plus family and walking holidays (or a combination of them).

Jonathan's Tours ⓦ www.jonathanstours.com. Family-run walking holidays with a very experienced guide.

Marengo Guided Walks ⓣ 01485/532710, ⓦ www.marengowalks.com. Easy walks guided by botanist Lance Chilton, an expert on Crete; tours take place every eighteen months to two years.

Naturetrek ⓣ 01962/733051, ⓦ www.naturetrek.co.uk. Spring and autumn botanical and bird-watching tours.

Ramblers Holidays ⓣ 01707/331133, ⓦ www.ramblersholidays.co.uk. Big, specialist walking-holiday company with seven and fourteen-day treks, mainly in the west; Manchester and London departures.

Sherpa Expeditions ⓣ 020/8572 9788, ⓦ www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk. Week-long self-guided walking itineraries in the west.

The Travelling Naturalist ⓣ 01305/267994, ⓦ www.naturalist.co.uk. Wildlife holiday company that runs an excellent annual bird-watching and wild-flower-spotting trip to Crete.

Yoga Plus ⓣ 01273/276175, ⓦ www.yogaplus.co.uk. Yoga courses in a remote part of the south. Accommodation is included, but transport is not.

Overland from the UK, Ireland and the rest of Europe

Travelling by **train** from Britain or Ireland to Crete takes at least three days. The train will only take you as far as mainland Greece, from where you'll have to continue your journey by plane or ferry (see p.38), and once you reach Crete there are no trains at all. However, you do have the chance to stop over on the way, while with an InterRail (for European residents only) or Eurail (for all others) pass you can take in Greece as part of a wider rail trip around Europe. The most practical route from Britain crosses France and Italy before embarking on the ferry from Bari or Brindisi to Pátra (Patras); alternatively, the much longer all-overland route goes via Vienna and Budapest. Booking well in advance (essential in summer at any event) and going for the cheapest seats on each leg, you can do this for less than £200, not including the incidental expenses along the way. Using rail passes will cost you more, but give far more flexibility. For full details of all the alternatives, check out the Man in Seat 61 website (see below).

Driving to Crete can also be a pleasant proposition if you have plenty of time to dawdle. It's only worth considering if you do want to explore en route, though, or are going to stay for an extended period – a month at the very least. The most popular **route** is again down through France and Italy to catch one of the Adriatic ferries. The much longer alternative through Eastern Europe (Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) only makes sense if you want to explore the rest of Greece on the way.

Once in **Italy**, you've a choice of five ports. Regular car and passenger ferries link Ancona, Bari and Brindisi with Igoumenítsa (the port of Epirus in western Greece) and/or Pátra (at the northwest tip of the Peloponnese). Generally, these ferries run year-round, but services are reduced December to April. Ferries also sail less regularly from Venice and Trieste to Pátra via Igoumenítsa/Corfu. The longer routes are more expensive, but the extra cost almost exactly matches what you'll pay in Italian motorway tolls and fuel to get to Brindisi. For direct access to Crete head for Pátra, from where you can cut across country to Pireás for daily ferries to the major cities, or head down through the Peloponnese to Kalamáta or Yíthio, from where there are two to three sailings a week to Kastélli in western Crete. For details of Greece-to-Crete ferries, see p.38.

In summer (especially July–Aug) it's essential to book tickets a few weeks ahead. During the winter you can usually just turn up at the main ports (Brindisi and Ancona have the most reliable departures at that time of year), but it's still wise to book a few days in advance if you're taking a car or want a cabin.

Rail contacts

UK and Ireland

The Man in Seat 61 ⓦ www.seat61.com. Named after British rail buff Mark Smith's favourite seat on the Eurostar, this brilliant site has full details of all the possible ways of getting to Crete by train and ferry, plus links to all the necessary train, ferry and ticket websites. Also has a new rail shop feature, where most tickets can be purchased.

Eurostar UK ⓣ0870/518 6186, ⓦwww.eurostar.com.

Rail Europe UK ⓣ0870 837 1371, ⓦwww.raileurope.co.uk. Discounted rail fares for under-26s on a variety of European routes; also agents for InterRail and Eurostar.

North America

DER Travel ⓣ1-888 337-7350, ⓦwww.dertravel.com/rail. Eurail and many individual country passes.

European Rail Services Canada ⓣ1-800 205-5800 or 416/695-1211, ⓦwww.europeanrailservices.com. Eurail and many individual country passes.

Rail Europe US ⓣ1-877 257-2887, Canada ⓣ1-800 361-RAIL, ⓦwww.raileurope.com. Official North American Eurail Pass agent; also sells most single-country passes.

Australia and New Zealand

CIT World Travel Australia ⓣ02/9267 1255 or 03/9650 5510, ⓦwww.cittravel.com.au. Eurail passes.

Rail Plus Australia ⓣ1300 555 003 or 03/9642 8644, ⓦwww.railplus.com.au. Eurail passes.

Trailfinders Australia ⓣ02/9247 7666, ⓦwww.trailfinder.com.au. All European passes.

Channel and Irish Sea crossings

Brittany Ferries UK ⓣ0870 366 5333, ⓦwww.brittanyferries.co.uk, Republic of Ireland ⓣ021/427 7801, ⓦwww.brittanyferries.ie. Portsmouth to Caen, St Malo or Cherbourg; Poole to Cherbourg; Plymouth to Roscoff; Cork to Roscoff.

Eurotunnel ⓣ0870 535 3535, ⓦwww.eurotunnel.com.

Irish Ferries Britain ⓣ0870 517 1717, Northern Ireland ⓣ00 353 818 300 400, Republic of Ireland ⓣ0818 300 400, ⓦwww.irishferries.com. Dublin to Holyhead; Rosslare to Pembroke, Cherbourg and Roscoff.

Norfolkline UK ⓣ0870/600 4321, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/819 2999, ⓦwww.norfolkline.com. Dublin and Belfast to Liverpool; Dover to Dunkirk.

P&O Ferries UK ⓣ0870 598 0333, ⓦwww.poferries.com. Dover to Calais; Hull to Rotterdam and Zeebrugge.

P&O Irish Sea UK ⓣ0870 242 4777, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/407 3434, ⓦwww.poirishsea.com. Dublin to Liverpool.

Sea France ⓣ0870 443 1653, ⓦwww.seafrance.com. Dover to Calais.

SpeedFerries ⓣ0870 220 0570, ⓦwww.speedferries.com. Dover to Boulogne.

Stena Line ⓣ0870 570 7070, Northern Ireland ⓣ0870 520 4204, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/204 7777, ⓦwww.stenaline.co.uk. Rosslare to Fishguard; Dun Laoghaire or Dublin to Holyhead; Belfast to Stranraer; Harwich to Hook of Holland.

Superfast Ferries ⓣ0870 234 0870, ⓦwww.superfast.com. Rosyth to Zeebrugge.

Transmanche UK ⓣ0800 917 1201, ⓦwww.transmancheferries.com. Newhaven to Dieppe.

Flights from North America

The Greek national airline, Olympic, flies to Athens out of New York (JFK, 3–7 weekly), Montréal and Toronto. The airline – and its domestic competitor Aegean – can offer reasonably priced add-on flights to Crete. Delta is the only North American carrier currently offering any direct service to Athens (daily from New York-JFK), though many others

Italy–Greece ferries

The following companies operate ferries from Italy to Greece: their websites have full route, fare and booking details. Viamare Travel Ltd (ⓣ0870 410 6040, ⓦwww.viamare.com) is the UK agent for most of these companies, and there are also links and booking for all of them at ⓦwww.ferries.gr.

Agoudimos Brindisi: ⓦwww.agoudimos-lines.com.

ANEK Ancona and Venice: ⓦwww.anek.gr.

Endeavor Lines Brindisi: ⓦwww.endeavor-lines.com.

Maritime Way Brindisi: ⓦwww.maritimeway.com

Fragline Brindisi: ⓦwww.fragline.gr.

Minoan Lines Ancona and Venice: ⓦwww.minoan.gr.

Superfast Ferries Ancona and Bari: ⓦwww.superfast.com.

Ventouris Bari: ⓦwww.ventouris.gr.

have code-sharing agreements and thus quote through-fares from Atlanta, Boston, Calgary, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, Vancouver and Washington, DC.

Nonstop flights **to Athens out of New York-JFK** cost US$600–1200 depending on season for a thirty-day ticket; one-stop flights via other European hubs can yield significant savings, especially in peak season. Common-rating (ie price-fixing) agreements between airlines means that fares to **Athens** from the **Midwest, Deep South or the West Coast** don't vary much: US$650–750 low season, US$1100–1300 high season. Such tickets typically involve the use of American Airlines, BA, United, Air France, Alitalia, Iberia, KLM, or Swiss, via their European gateway cities. With little to distinguish itineraries price-wise, you might examine the stopover time at their respective European hubs, as these often differ by several hours. You may be better off getting a domestic add-on to New York and heading directly to Athens from there.

As with the US, airfares **from Canada** vary depending on where you start your journey, and whether you take a direct service. Olympic flies out of Toronto, with a stop in Montréal, three to four times weekly **to Athens**; they're rarely the cheapest option, though. Most of the time you'll have to choose among one- or two-stop itineraries on a variety of European carriers or perhaps Delta via New York; costs run from CDN$1300 in low season from Toronto to over CDN$3000 from Vancouver in high season.

For all of the above, a **connecting flight to Crete** will add $75–150 (Can$100–200), depending on season and the airline.

Airlines

Air Canada ⓣ1-888 247-2262, ⓦwww.aircanada.com.

Air France ⓣ1-800 237-2747, Canada ⓣ1-800 667-2747, ⓦwww.airfrance.com.

Alitalia ⓣ1-800 223-5730, Canada ⓣ1-800 361-8336, ⓦwww.alitalia.com.

American Airlines ⓣ1-800 433-7300, ⓦwww.aa.com.

British Airways ⓣ1-800 AIRWAYS, ⓦwww.ba.com.

Delta Air Lines ⓣ1-800 241-1212, ⓦwww.delta.com.

Iberia ⓣ1-800 772-4642, ⓦwww.iberia.com.

Lufthansa US ⓣ1-800 645-3880, Canada ⓣ1-800 563-5954, ⓦwww.lufthansa.com.

Malev US ⓣ1-212-566-9944, Canada ⓣ1-800 665-6363, ⓦwww.malev.hu.

Northwest/KLM US ⓣ1-800 225-2525, ⓦwww.nwa.com.

Olympic Airways ⓣ1-800 223-1226, Canada ⓣ1-416 964-2720, ⓦwww.olympicairlines.com.

Swiss ⓣ1-877 FLY-SWISS, ⓦwww.swiss.com.

United Airlines ⓣ1-800 UNITED-1, ⓦwww.united.com.

US Airways ⓣ1-800 428-4322, ⓦwww.usair.com.

Virgin Atlantic ⓣ1-800 821-5438, ⓦwww.virgin-atlantic.com.

Travel companies

Air Brokers International ⓣ1-800 883-3273 ⓦwww.airbrokers.com. Consolidator and specialist in RTW tickets.

Airtech ⓣ212/219-7000, ⓦwww.airtech.com. Standby seat broker; also deals in consolidator fares and courier flights.

Educational Travel Center ⓣ1-800 747-5551 ⓦwww.edtrav.com. Low-cost fares worldwide, student/youth discount offers, Eurail passes.

Flightcentre US ⓣ1-866 WORLD-51, ⓦwww.flightcentre.us, Canada ⓣ1-877 WORLD-02, ⓦwww.flightcentre.ca. Rock-bottom fares worldwide.

STA Travel US ⓣ1-800 781-4040, Canada ⓣ1-888/427-5639, ⓦwww.statravel.com. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail passes, etc.

Student Flights ⓣ1-800 255-8000 ⓦwww.isecard.com/studentflights. Student/youth fares, plus student IDs and European rail and bus passes.

TFI Tours ⓣ1-800 745-8000 or 212/736-1140, ⓦwww.lowestairprice.com. Consolidator with global fares.

Travel Cuts US ⓣ1-800 592-CUTS, Canada ⓣ1-888 246-9762, ⓦwww.travelcuts.com. Popular, long-established student-travel organization, with worldwide offers.

Travelers Advantage ⓣ1-800 835-8747, ⓦwww.travelersadvantage.com. Discount travel club, with cashback deals and discounted car rental. Membership required ($1 for 3 months' trial).

Travelosophy US ⓣ1-800 332-2687, ⓦwww.itravelosophy.com. Good range of discounted and student fares worldwide.

Specialist tour operators

Astra ⓣ303/321-5403, ⓦwww.astragreece.com. Very personal, idiosyncratic, two-week tours led by veteran Hellenophile Thordis Simonsen.

Classic Adventures ⓣ1-800/777-8090, ⓦwww.classicadventures.com. Ten- and twelve-day hiking and biking tours.

Freewheeling Adventures ⓣ1-800/672-0775, ⓦwww.freewheeling.ca. Eight-day cycling tours.

Hellenic Adventures ⓣ1-800 851-6349, ⓦwww.hellenicadventures.com. Tailor-made itineraries plus small-group tours that include Crete along with other parts of Greece.

Homeric Tours ⓣ1-800/223-5570, ⓦwww.homerictours.com. Arranges hotel packages, individual tours, escorted group tours (though none exclusively to Crete), and fly/drive deals. Good source of inexpensive flights.

Northwest Passage ⓣ1-800/RECREATE, ⓦwww.nwpassage.com. Excellent cycling, sea-kayaking and hiking "inn-to-inn" tours of Crete, as well as combinations thereof.

Tourlite Zeus ⓣ1-800/272-7600, ⓦwww.tourlite.com. Specialists in Greek travel, can arrange tailor-made or package vacations in Crete.

Flights from Australia and New Zealand

As of writing, there are no direct flights from Australia or New Zealand to Greece; you'll have to change planes in southeast Asia or elsewhere in Europe. Tickets purchased direct from the airlines tend to be expensive; travel agents or Australia-based websites offer much better deals on fares and have the latest information on limited specials and stopovers. For a simple return fare, you may also have to buy an add-on internal flight to get you to the international departure point.

Fares **from Australia** start from around A$1500, rising to around A$2500 depending on season, routing, validity, number of stopovers etc. The shortest flights and best fares are generally with airlines like Thai, Singapore and Emirates that can fly you directly to Athens from their Asian hubs, though you'll also find offers on Swiss, KLM and other European carriers. **From New Zealand**, off-season prices (on much the same airlines) can be lower: from as little as NZ$1500, rising to perhaps $2800 for a more flexible high-season flight.

If Greece is only one stop on a longer journey, you might consider buying a **Round-the-World** (RTW) fare, although Greece never seems to be included in any of the cheaper deals, which means you might have to stump up around A$3400/NZ$3800 for one of the fully flexible multi-stop fares from One World or the Star Alliance. At that price, you may be better off with a cheaper deal and a separate ticket to Greece once you get to Europe.

You should be able to add a **connecting flight from Athens to Crete** with Olympic or Aegean for around A$100–200, NZ$115–230.

Airlines

Air New Zealand Australia ⓣ13 24 76, ⓦwww.airnz.com.au, New Zealand ⓣ0800 737 000, ⓦwww.airnz.co.nz.

Alitalia Australia ⓣ02/9244 2445, New Zealand ⓣ09/308 3357, ⓦwww.alitalia.com.

British Airways Australia ⓣ1300 767 177, New Zealand ⓣ09/966 9777, ⓦwww.ba.com.

Emirates Australia ⓣ02/9290 9700, New Zealand ⓣ09/968 2200, ⓦwww.emirates.com.

Gulf Air Australia ⓣ1300/366 337, ⓦwww.gulfairco.com.

KLM Australia ⓣ1300/303 747, New Zealand ⓣ09/921 6040, ⓦwww.klm.com.

Lufthansa Australia ⓣ1300 655 727, New Zealand ⓣ0800 945 220, ⓦwww.lufthansa.com.

Qantas Australia ⓣ13 13 13, New Zealand ⓣ0800 808 767, ⓦwww.qantas.com.

Royal Jordanian Australia ⓣ02/9244 2701, New Zealand ⓣ03/365 3910, ⓦwww.rja.com.jo.

Singapore Airlines Australia ⓣ13 10 11, New Zealand ⓣ0800 808 909, ⓦwww.singaporeair.com.

Swiss Australia ⓣ1300/724 666, New Zealand ⓣ09/977 2238, ⓦwww.swiss.com.

Thai Airways Australia ⓣ1300 651 960, New Zealand ⓣ09/377 3886, ⓦwww.thaiair.com.

Travel agents

Flight Centre Australia ⓣ13 31 33, ⓦwww.flightcentre.com.au, New Zealand ⓣ0800 243 544, ⓦwww.flightcentre.co.nz.

Grecian Tours Australia ⓣ03/9663 3711, ⓦwww.greciantours.com.au. A variety of accommodation and sightseeing tours, plus flights.

STA Travel Australia ⓣ134 STA, ⓦwww.statravel.com.au, New Zealand ⓣ0800 474 400, ⓦwww.statravel.co.nz.

Sun Island Tours Australia ⓣ02/9283 3840, ⓦwww.sunislandtours.com.au. Good choice of hotel-based package holidays.
Trailfinders Australia ⓣ02/9247 7666, ⓦwww.trailfinders.com.au.

Flights from Greece

Flying to Crete from Greece doesn't necessarily mean going via Athens, although the vast majority of people do. There are also daily direct flights with Aegean, Olympic and Sky Express from Thessaloníki, and in summer from the island of Rhodes (and other islands with Sky Express), as well as connections from every other regional Greek airport. From Athens, however, Olympic and Aegean between them operate at least fourteen flights a day to Iráklion in peak season, and nine or ten daily to Haniá, plus three a week on Olympic to Sitía. Journey time is less than an hour. This may seem plenty of flights, but in summer they are all booked well in advance. If time is your main consideration, flying is good value when weighed against a ferry trip: one-way prices are around €85.

Whether flights are fully booked or not, it can be worth trying for a **stand-by** ticket, especially if you arrive at Athens airport in the middle of the night and can be first in the queue next morning. You have to purchase a ticket (by credit card will do) in order to get on the stand-by list: if, in the end, you don't manage to fly they should give you a full refund. Once you're on the list the system works pretty well, despite appearances – just make sure you are by the departure gate when they call out the names of the lucky few for each flight.

Domestic airlines

Aegean Óthonos 10 ⓣ210 33 15 515, reservations ⓣ801 11 20 000, airport ⓣ 210 35 30 101, ⓦwww.aegeanair.com.
Olympic Fillelínon 15 ⓣ210 92 67 555, reservations ⓣ801 11 44444, airport ⓣ210 35 68 447, ⓦwww.olympicairlines.com.
Sky Express Iráklion ⓣ2810 223 500, ⓦwww.skyexpress.gr

Ferries from Pireás and elsewhere

The vast majority of ferry traffic to Crete goes from **Pireás** (the port of Athens), leaving in the evening and arriving the following morning; in summer there's also a fast afternoon service to Haniá. There are also ferries from the Peloponnese (handy if you're coming overland via Italy) and from many of the Cycladic and Dodecanese islands.

You can buy **tickets** from dozens of agencies at the harbour in Pireás, or in central Athens, as well as from booths on the docks near the boats. If you're taking a car or want a cabin it's worth booking ahead, but deck-class tickets are almost always available on the spot. Itineraries, tickets and office addresses are available on the ferry-line websites (see p.38).

The cheapest tickets are in deck class, which gives you the run of almost the entire boat, excluding the cabins and the upper-class restaurant and bar. Most of the ferries serving Crete are modern and reasonably luxurious, with plenty of café and "pullman seating" areas inside, though often without a huge amount of deck space. If you are travelling deck class, it's worth getting on board reasonably an hour before departure to claim a good space. Cabins are also available, ranging from four-berth, shared cabins inside (all en-suite and perfectly adequate) through various grades up to deluxe suites with huge picture windows.

Ferries from Pireás are operated by ANEK (to Iráklion, Haniá and Réthimnon), Minoan (Iráklion), Hellenic Seaways (high speed to Haniá) and LANE (to Áyios Nikólaos and Sitía). Beware of tickets offered on any other line – these will almost certainly involve a roundabout route through the Cyclades and take twice as long.

For Iráklion there are two daily departures, at 8.30pm and 9pm, arriving at 5.30am and 6am. Haniá has one overnight ferry plus a fast catamaran at 3.45pm (March–Oct, arrives 8.30pm); for Réthimnon there's a daily departure at 8pm. For Sitía there are currently two evening sailings a week (Mon & Fri); the Monday service calls at Áyios Nikólaos.

Prices to Iráklion – which is marginally more expensive than the other routes – range from around €30–35 deck class to €55–60 for a berth in a basic cabin to €85–90 per person in a luxurious double, while regular cars go for €90 and motorbikes for

Travelling to Crete via Athens provides a great opportunity to check out the revived Greek capital and to take in some of its unique cultural attractions. Athens has been transformed since the 2004 Olympics: there's excellent public transport between the airport and the port via the centre of town, an unrivalled Classical Greek heritage, great restaurants and a lively street life. A couple of nights' stopover will allow you to take in the Acropolis and the other major ancient sites and museums, wander around the old quarter of Pláka and the bazaar area, and sample some of the country's best food and nightlife. Even in a single day, a morning arrival would give you time for a look at the Acropolis and Pláka before heading down to Pireás to catch an overnight ferry.

Arrival and information

Athens' airport, 33km southeast of the city, has excellent facilities including several ATMs, bureaux de change, luggage storage and a tourist office. **Public transportation** is excellent. The **Metro** (€6 single, €10 return, discounts for multiple tickets) is usually most convenient, taking you straight into the heart of the city where you can change to the other metro lines at either Monastiráki (for Pireás) or Sýndagma: trains run every half hour from 6.30am to 11.30pm and take around thirty minutes. The **suburban train** to Baríssis station (see below) is not quite so handy for the centre of town but it runs longer hours (5.50am–1.20am) for identical fares.

Buses are much slower, especially at rush hours, but they're also cheaper, run all night and offer direct links to other parts of the city including Pireás. The most useful are the #X95 to Sýndagma square (at least three an hour, day and night) and #X96 to Pireás (at least two an hour, day and night). **Tickets** cost €3.20 from a booth beside the stops or on the bus; make sure you have small change.

Taxis are subject to the vagaries of traffic and can take anything from forty minutes (at night) to an hour and forty minutes (at rush hour) to reach the centre; the fare should be roughly €18–25 to central Athens or Pireás.

All international **trains** arrive at the Stathmós Baríssis, just to the northwest of the city centre. There's a metro station immediately outside, or yellow trolley bus #1 passes right through the centre and past the Acropolis.

The ferry port at **Pireás** is around 9km from the city centre. The metro takes about 25 minutes (Line 1 via Omónia and Monastiráki); taxis should cost €7–10; or buses (#40 from Sýndagma, #49 from Omónia) run all night. If you're travelling by rail from Pátra, the train continues through Athens down to Pireás.

The main **Tourist Office** is at Amalías 26, just off Sýndagma square (Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat & Sun 11am–4pm).

Accommodation

Finding accommodation in Athens is only likely to be a problem during the midsummer peak – even so it's always best to phone ahead or book online. On the whole, it's expensive. The small selection below covers a range of the cheaper options, from hostels to mid-range hotels.

For a quick stay you want to be right in the centre, and most of those included are in Pláka, the oldest quarter of the city, in the shadow of the Acropolis, with lots of outdoor restaurants and cafés.

Acropolis House Kódhrou 6 Ⓣ210 32 22 344, Ⓔhtlacrhs@otenet.gr. Metro Sýndagma. A rambling, slightly dilapidated 150-year-old mansion much loved by its regulars – mostly students and academics. Breakfast included. ⑤

Athens Backpackers Mákri 12, Makriyiánni, Ⓣ210 92 24 044, Ⓦwww.backpackers.gr. Very central Athenian-Australian-run backpackers' hotel with few frills, but clean rooms, communal kitchen, Internet access, bar, fabulous rooftop view and great atmosphere. Dorms €18–22.

Athos Patröou 3 Ⓣ210 32 21 977, Ⓦathoshotel.gr. Metro Sýndagma. Small hotel with comfortable en-suite rooms with TV, a/c, mini-bar etc. Also a rooftop bar with Acropolis views. B & B. ⑥

Central Apóllonos 21 Ⓣ210 32 34 357, Ⓦwww.centralhotel.gr. Metro Sýndagma. Designer-style rooms with marble bathrooms and excellent soundproofing. Family and interconnecting rooms also available; all with a/c, TV, fridge and everything you'd expect. Large roof terrace with Acropolis views and hot tub. B & B. ⑧

Evropi Satovriándhou 7 Ⓣ210 52 23 081. Metro Omónia. Very, very basic but great value old-fashioned hotel. Reasonably quiet, despite being only a block from Platía Omonías; inexpensive single rooms. ②

Marble House Cul-de-sac off A. Zínni 35A, Koukáki Ⓣ210 92 34 058, Ⓦwww.marblehouse.gr. Metro Syngroú-Fix. Family-run, friendly and not far from the action. Simple rooms with and without private bath, some with a/c (for extra charge). ③

Phaedra Herefóndos 16, corner Adhrianoú Ⓣ210 32 38 461, Ⓕ210 32 27 795. Metro Akrópoli. Simple rooms with bare tile floors, TV and a/c, not all en suite (but you get a private bathroom). One of the best deals in Pláka. ④

Student & Traveller's Inn Kydhathinéon 16 Ⓣ210 32 44 808, Ⓦwww.studenttravellersinn.com. Metro Akrópolí/Sýndagma. Perennially popular travellers' meeting place. Dorm beds from €16 to €26; private quads, triples and doubles, en suite or shared bath. Clean and comfortable, though not always the quietest. ⑤

Tempi Eólou 29 Ⓣ210 32 13 175, Ⓦwww.travelling.gr/tempihotel. Metro Monastiráki. Budget backpackers' hotel with tiny rooms, most with shared facilities, and shared kitchen. Good location in market area. ④

Thission Apostólou Pávlou 25, Thissío Ⓣ210 34 67 634, Ⓦwww.hotel-thission.gr. Metro Thissío. Threadbare rooms (with a/c and TV), but virtually every one has a magnificent view of the Acropolis and there's a pleasant roof-terrace café. In a lively, newly fashionable area. ⑥

Eating

Pláka is bursting with touristy restaurants, most of them poor value despite their great locations. Among the best of these, with tables outside on a stepped street beneath the Acropolis, is the *Mezedopolio Palio Tetradhio* at Mnisikléous 26, often with live music. For more authentic and cheaper fare head towards Monastiráki or its trendy neighbour Psyrrí: *Baïraktaris* on Platía Monastirakíou serves great Greek classics and kebabs; *Café Abysinia* on nearby Platía Avysinnías offers a more modern (and more expensive) take on traditional Greek cooking – always busy with a young local crowd; *Taverna tou Psyrri*, Eskhýlou 12, in the midst of the lively nightlife, is another that's always packed.

The city and sights

The centre of Athens is compact, and anything not in walking distance is well served by the metro, bus or inexpensive taxis. Finding your bearings is generally pretty easy: the **Acropolis** is visible, around a corner, from almost any part of the city centre. Beneath it to the east lies **Pláka**, with **Monastiráki** curling around to the north. **Sýndagma** (Platía Syndágmatos), the traditional centre of the city and home to the Greek Parliament, lies to the northeast of these two, midway between the Acropolis and the hill of **Lykavitós**. The ritzy **Kolonáki** quarter curls up the hill's slopes above Sýndagma, with a funicular to save you the final climb to the summit and its famous views. Below Kolonáki many of the city's major **museums** can be found along Leofóros Vasilísis Sofías.

To the north, broad avenues lead to **Omónia** (Platía Omonías), the heart of commercial and business Athens. The **market and bazaar** area lies en route, while further north are the **National Archeological Museum** and the slightly alternative, studenty neighbourhoods of **Exárhia** and **Neápoli**, with a concentration of lively tavernas and bars. Close to the market you'll find the thriving nightlife of **Psyrrí**.

The inevitable focus of any visit to Athens, however brief, is the **Acropolis** (daily April–Sept 8am–7.30pm; Oct–March 8am–4.30pm; €12 ticket includes most other major Classical sites; metro Akrópoli), whose complex of temples, rebuilt by Pericles in the "Golden Age" of the fifth century BC, is focused on the famed **Parthenon**. Other outstanding Classical sites include the **Theatre of Dionysos** (same hours), on the south slope of the Acropolis; the **Ancient Agora** or market area (same hours; metro Monastiráki) on the opposite side of the Acropolis; the nearby **Roman Forum** (daily: summer 8.30am–7.30pm; winter 8.30am–3pm; metro Monastiráki); and the ancient cemetery, the **Kerameikos** (daily 8.30am–3pm; metro Thissío). Entrance to all of these is included in the Acropolis ticket.

Also unmissable is the refurbished **National Archeological Museum** (summer Mon 1–7.30pm, Tues–Sun 8.30am–7.30pm; winter Mon 10.30am–5pm, Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €7; metro Viktorías or any bus labelled *Mousseio*) at 28 Oktovríou 44. Quite simply the finest collection of Greek antiquities anywhere in the world, its highlights include *Odyssey*-era gold treasures from Mycenae and a vast collection of wonderful sculpture.

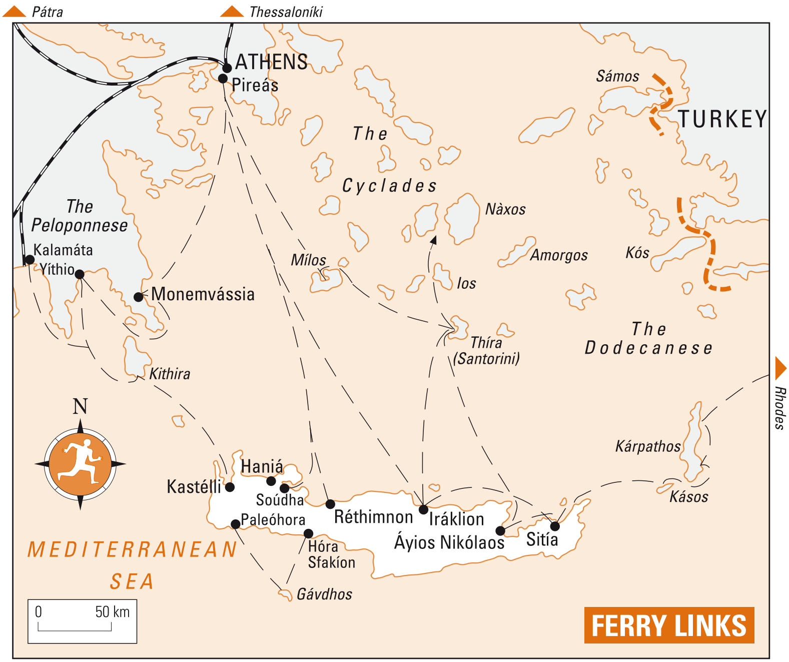
Other excellent museums include the **Benáki** (Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat 9am–5pm, Thurs 9am–midnight, Sun 9am–3pm; €6; metro Evangelismós), at Koumbári 1, at the corner of Vassilísis Sofías, a fascinating personal collection of ancient and folk treasures; the nearby **Goulandhrís Museum of Cycladic Art** (Mon & Wed–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat 10am–3pm; €5; metro Evangelismós), with wonderful figurines from the third millennium BC; the **Byzantine and Christian Museum** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €4; metro Evangelismós) at Vassilísis Sofías 22, for icons and religious architecture; and the **Folk Art Museum** (Tues–Sun 10am–2pm; €2), Kydhathinéon 17 in Pláka, for weaving, pottery, regional costumes and other traditional Greek arts and crafts.

around €20: the older, slower ferries are generally slightly cheaper than the more luxurious, faster ones.

Much the most useful of the other ferry services is that from the **Peloponnese**, operated by ANEN Lines. The schedule is somewhat confusing and varies according to the season, but generally there's at least one departure a week from Yíthio and one from Kalamáta to Kastélli Kissámou. This service is subject to delays as the ferry follows its convoluted schedule.

Ferry companies

ANEK Lines ⓣ210 41 97 420, ⓦwww.anek.gr.
ANEN Lines ⓣ28210 20 345, ⓦwww.anen.gr.
Hellenic Seaways ⓣ210 41 99 000, ⓦwww.hellenicseawys.gr.
LANE Lines ⓣ210 42 74 011, ⓦwww.lane.gr.
Minoan Lines ⓣ210 41 45 700, ⓦwww.minoan.gr.
Paleologos An Iráklion-based shipping agency whose website has information on all domestic and international ferries, plus rather clunky online booking. ⓣ28103 46 185, ⓦwww.ferries.gr.


Pátra
Thessaloníki
ATHENS
Pireás
The Cyclades
Sámos
TURKEY
Nàxos
The Peloponnese
Kalamáta
Yíthio
Mílos
Amorgos
Kós
Ios
Monemvássia
Thíra (Santorini)
The Dodecanese
Kithira
Rhodes
N
Kárpathos
Haniá
Kastélli
Soúdha
Kásos
Paleóhora
Réthimnon
Iráklion
Áyios Nikólaos
Sitía
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Hóra Sfakíon
Gávdhos
0
50 km
FERRY LINKS

Information and Crete on the Web

The National Tourist Organization of Greece (Ellinikós Organismós Tourismoú, or EOT; GNTO abroad, ⓦwww.gnto.gr) maintains offices in most European capitals (though not Dublin), plus the USA, Canada and Australia (see p.40 for addresses). It publishes an array of free, glossy, regional pamphlets, including one on Crete plus others that have some relevance, but nothing really worth going out of your way for. They should be helpful when it comes to answering specific enquiries, however.

On the island, there are **local tourist offices** in the major towns and many smaller resorts, most of which are extremely helpful and can provide an array of maps, timetables and leaflets as well as details of local accommodation, sometimes providing a booking service as well. You'll find them listed in the text. The **tourist police** may also be helpful: a branch (or often just a single delegate) of the local police, they should have some knowledge of English and deal with complaints about restaurants, taxis, hotels and all things tourist-related; call ⓣ171 for information and help, and see individual towns for local addresses. In addition, local **travel agencies** are always helpful and many voluntarily act as improvised tourist offices, often making a pretty good job of it; many of these, too, are listed throughout the Guide.

Greek tourist offices abroad

Australia 51 Pitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000 ⓣ02/9241 1663, ⓔhto@tpg.com.au.
Canada 1500 Don Mills Rd, Suite 102, Toronto, ON M3B 3K4 ⓣ416/968-2220, ⓔgrnto.tor@on.aibn.com.
UK 4 Conduit St, London W1R 0DJ ⓣ020/7495 4300, ⓦwww.gnto.co.uk.
USA 645 Fifth Ave, Suite 903, New York, NY 10022 ⓣ212/421-5777, ⓦwww.greektourism.com.

Crete on the Internet

Crete is strongly represented on the Internet with many bilingual English–Greek websites offering information on nearly every conceivable subject. Some of the more informative ones are listed below and many of these have links to myriad other sites; specialist transport and accommodation sites are listed in the relevant sections of Basics, and purely local sites are often recommended in the Guide.

Travel and general information

ⓦ**www.camping-in-greece.gr** Details of all the campsites on the island.
ⓦ**www.cretanvista.gr** Guide to the Rodhópou Peninisula in Haniá, with lots of general island info and links.
ⓦ**www.cretetravel.com** Excellent general site with information on transport and the practicalities of life, maps, weather, and articles on most places you might visit, plus links to hotels, car rental and more.
ⓦ**www.explorecrete.com** Comprehensive travel operator's site, with ideas of things to do on the island plus plenty of practical and cultural information.
ⓦ**www.gtp.gr** The website of Greek Travel Pages (the fat printed manual on every Greek travel agent's desk); extensive listings of hotels and transport timetables, but not very user-friendly.
ⓦ**www.infocrete.com** Links to 100 top Cretan websites, as voted by their users: lots of local sites and webcams.
ⓦ**www.interkriti.org** Extraordinarily comprehensive site, including maps, images, recipes, aerial photography, a forum, and links to hotels, local travel agents and car rental outlets. Not always easy to find exactly what you're looking for, though.
ⓦ**www.livingincrete.net** As the name suggests, information for those living in Crete or thinking about it, including useful sections on red tape and local customs.
ⓦ**www.palekastro.com** Information on the far east, plus lots of links to more general sites.
ⓦ**www.sfakia-crete.com** Huge site mainly dealing with the Sfakiá area of the south coast, but also with dozens of links and plenty of interesting general articles.
ⓦ**www.villasincrete.com** Extensive listings of villas – mostly in the west. You can view the property and book online.
ⓦ**www.west-crete.com** As the name suggests, mainly covers the west of the island, but plenty of links and more general info.
ⓦ**www.wkistler.de** Hundreds of images of Crete (mainly Sfakiá), including many historic ones.

News

ⓦ**www.athensnews.gr** The online edition of the *Athens News*, Greece's longest-running quality English-language newspaper.
ⓦ**www.cretegazette.com** Website of a free magazine distributed on the island, with local-interest articles and news.
ⓦ**www.ekathimerini.com** The online edition of the abridged English translation of *Kathimerini*, one of Greece's most respected dailies. It's fully archived for years back and has an excellent search facility.
ⓦ**www.stigmes.gr** Online version of Crete's leading current affairs and style magazine; has a variety of stuff in English including cartoons and interesting articles on Cretan topics, as well as useful links.

Archeology, history and specialist interest

ⓦ**www.bsa.gla.ac.uk/knosos** Information on Knossós, with photos and 3D download of the site.
ⓦ**www.ancient-greece.org** Lots of information on ancient Cretan sites, including an interactive map showing settlements from various eras and plenty of pictures.
ⓦ**www.climbincrete.com** Does exactly what it says: details of rock climbing and mountaineering, as well as easier treks.
ⓦ**www.cretan-music.com** An interesting website with useful background on Cretan traditional music, instruments and festivals and a CD shop.
ⓦ**www.culture.gr** The Greek Ministry of Culture's website. Good alphabetical gazetteer to monuments, archeological sites and museums, plus opening hours and prices that aren't always up to date.
ⓦ**www.e-history.gr/en/** Greek history site, including good pages on the Minoans.
ⓦ**www.ornithologiki.gr** Website of the Hellenic Ornithological Society, worth exploring for all sorts of information including details of birdwatching sites in Crete, details of some of the rarer species, and relevant links.

Books and souvenirs

ⓦ **www.cretashop.gr** Online shop selling all kinds of Cretan products including herbs, wines, clothes, CDs and books.

ⓦ **www.hellenicbookservice.com**
Website of major UK stockist of Greek- and Crete-related books complete with opinionated reviews of its stock and an online purchasing facility.

Getting around

Crete is, on the whole, pretty easy to get around. The main towns and resorts along the north coast are linked by an excellent road and a fast and frequent bus service. Elsewhere the road network is rapidly being upgraded, and most villages see at least one daily bus. However, if you're keen to escape the crowds and experience some of Crete's more remote beaches and spectacular mountain scenery, you'll need to get off the main roads; for at least some of your time it's worth considering renting some transport or setting out on foot – better still, a combination of the two.

The main public transport **routes** are detailed at the end of each chapter in "Travel details".

Buses

The only form of public transport on Crete, buses cover the island remarkably comprehensively. Modern, fast and efficient buses run along the main north-coast road every hour or so, while off the major routes services vary. The ones used primarily by tourists (to Omalós and Hóra Sfakíon for the Samariá gorge, for example, or to Festós and Mátala) tend also to be modern and convenient. Those that cater mainly for locals are generally older vehicles that run once-daily as transport to market or school – into the provincial capital very early in the morning and back out to the village around lunchtime, which means they're of little use for day-trips. There are few places not accessible by bus, though, and if you combine buses with some walking you'll get about extremely cheaply, if not always especially quickly.

Buses on Crete are run by a consortium of companies jointly known as KTEL. That this is not one single company is most obvious in Iráklion where there are two separate termini, operated by several companies, each serving different directions. On the whole, buses to a given village run from the provincial capital – Iráklion, Réthimnon and Haniá, or in Lasíthi province from Áyios Nikólaos and Sitía. There are also a number of small-scale services that cross inter-provincial borders. Photocopied current timetables (which vary seasonally) are generally available from bus stations and tourist offices: you can also find timetables and fares on the Web (ⓦwww.bus-service-crete-ktel.com or ⓦwww.ktel-heraklio-lassithi.gr), though these are not always right up to date.

Prices remain reasonable: each hop between the major north coast towns – Iráklion to Réthimnon or Áyios Nikólaos, for example, or Réthimnon to Haniá – currently costs around €6 one way.

Taxis and tours

Local taxis are exceptionally good value, at least as long as the meter is running or you've fixed a price in advance. Much of their business is long-distance, taking people to and from the villages around the main towns (at some city taxi ranks and all major airports, there's a printed list of prices to the most common destinations). If you want to visit somewhere where there's only one bus, or spend some time hiking and get a ride back, it's well worth arranging for a taxi to pick you up: four people together in a taxi will pay little more per person than on the bus.

It's also quite easy to negotiate a day's or half-day's sightseeing trip by taxi, although this may require some Greek, and over long distances can become expensive.

A simpler alternative for a one-off visit is to take a bus tour. Travel agents everywhere offer the obvious ones – the Samariá gorge, Vái beach, and a local "Cretan night". A few offer much more adventurous alternatives, and some of the best of these are detailed in the Guide. They're worth at least considering as a relatively inexpensive and easy way to see things you might otherwise be unable to get to, and you can always escape from the rest of the group once there.

Driving

Renting a **car** or **bike** (or bringing your own), will give you a huge amount of extra freedom to explore and to check out mountain villages and isolated beaches. Most people seem to do so for at least part of their stay, and there are numerous operators in every resort, the vast majority of them offering modern, reliable vehicles and competitive rates.

Do take the time, however, to check out any vehicle carefully before driving off. More importantly, take care while driving, as Greece has a very high **accident** rate compared with northern Europe or North America. This is in part due to the state of the roads and the nature of the countryside: although many minor roads have been upgraded in recent years, they are still very mountainous and winding, and you'll frequently pass without warning from a smooth, modern surface to a stretch of potholed track. Signage is also poor in many places, and road traffic rules often ignored. On the main, north coast highway – an excellent road for the most part – you're expected to drive with at least two wheels on the hard shoulder to allow faster vehicles to overtake.

EU **driving licences** are valid in Crete, and in practice you can rent a vehicle with almost any valid national licence: however non-EU drivers are legally required to have an International Driving Permit (acquired before leaving home through organizations such as the AAA), and the lack of one could cause problems should you have a run-in with the police. In general, traffic laws are now enforced far more seriously than they used to be, especially in and around the big towns: in particular it is compulsory to wear **seatbelts**, and for motorcyclists to wear **helmets**. There has also been a major crackdown on **drunk driving** in recent years, with random checks and roadblocks, especially designed to catch clubbers heading home in the early hours of the morning around major towns and resorts. **Parking** can also be a headache, especially in the big towns.

If you are involved in any kind of **accident** it's illegal to drive away, and you can theoretically be held at a police station for up to 24 hours. If this happens, ring your consulate immediately to get a lawyer (you have this right). Don't make a statement to anyone who doesn't speak, and write, very good English. On-the-spot fines can be issued for minor traffic infringements such as speeding or crossing a central double white line. You'll be issued with a ticket by a police officer, describing the infraction (in Greek) plus the amount of the fine, which varies from around €50 to €200 depending on the gravity of the offence. The address on the ticket will detail the office in the nearest town to which you should go to pay the fine. If you're in a hire car don't be tempted to discard the ticket: the system sends a fax within hours to the car rental office with details of the offence and the fine, which will be added to your hire charge.

Petrol/gasoline currently costs around €0.95 a litre. It's easy to run out of fuel after dark or at weekends, especially in the extreme east and west of the island; most rural stations close at 7 or 8pm and some shut at weekends. When touring in these areas it's wise to maintain a full tank, especially when a weekend or national holiday is approaching.

Car rental

Car rental in Crete starts at around €30 a day or €160 a week in high season for the smallest model (such as a Fiat Seicento or Suzuki Alto), including unlimited mileage, tax and insurance. You'll pay at least 25 percent more than this if you use a major international name such as Hertz, and in any event it's always worth shopping around and checking prices carefully to avoid hidden extras (in particular for insurance). Outside peak season prices drop by about 25 percent, especially if you're hiring locally. An open-top jeep or a van will cost up to three times as much; jeeps can be fun, but there's little point going for a particularly fancy vehicle – you'll rarely get a chance to drive at great speed, and small cars are a positive advantage when parking or negotiating narrow village streets.

Many package holidays will include a car, and if not there's a great deal to be said for organising your rental in advance (especially in high season). You'll generally get better rates through a local company (some details listed opposite, others can be found through the websites listed on p.40) or a specialist such as Holiday Autos or AutoEurope (details below) than through one of the big names. If you go for a Cretan company pick one that is local to where you intend to head or, if you're touring around, one that has offices around the island to ensure that there's help available should you need it. Local operators are listed throughout the Guide.

All agencies require either a credit card or a very large cash deposit up front. Minimum age requirements vary from 21 to 25. Be sure to check that full insurance and a collision damage waiver is included, and note that damage to tyres and the underside of the vehicle are usually excluded from the insurance, so take care on bumpy dirt roads.

Car rental agencies

International

AutoEurope US and Canada Ⓣ1-888-223-5555, UK Ⓣ0870/606 0100, Australia Ⓣ0011-800-223-5555-5 Ⓦwww.autoeurope.com, Ⓦwww.autoeurope.co.uk, Ⓦwww.autoeurope.com.au.

Avis US Ⓣ1-800-230-4898, Canada Ⓣ1-800-272-5871, UK Ⓣ0870/606 0100, Republic of Ireland Ⓣ021/428 1111, Australia Ⓣ13 63 33 or 02/9353 9000, New Zealand Ⓣ09/526 2847 or 0800/655 111, Ⓦwww.avis.com, Ⓦwww.avis.co.uk.

Europcar US & Canada Ⓣ1-877-940 6900, UK Ⓣ0870/607 5000, Republic of Ireland Ⓣ01/614 2800, Australia Ⓣ393/306 160, Ⓦwww.europcar.com, Ⓦwww.europcar.co.uk.

Hertz US & Canada Ⓣ1-800-654-3131, UK Ⓣ020/7026 0077, Republic of Ireland Ⓣ01/870 5777, New Zealand Ⓣ0800/654 321, Ⓦwww.hertz.com.

Holiday Autos US Ⓣ866-392-9288, UK Ⓣ0870/400 4461, Republic of Ireland Ⓣ01/872 9366, Australia Ⓣ299/394 433, New Zealand Ⓣ0800/14 40 40, Ⓦwww.holidayautos.com, Ⓦwww.holidayautos.co.uk.

National Ⓣ0870/536 5365, Ⓦwww.nationalcar.co.uk.

Suncars UK Ⓣ0870/902 8021, Republic of Ireland Ⓣ1850/201 416, Ⓦwww.suncars.com.

Sixt Republic of Ireland Ⓣ61/20 60 88, UK Ⓣ0870/1 567 567, Australia Ⓣ1300 660 660, Ⓦwww.e-sixt.com.

In Crete

Alianthos Airports, Plakiás and offices in western Crete Ⓣ2810 221215, Ⓦwww.alianthos-group.com.

Blue Sea Iráklion and offices around Crete Ⓣ2810 221215, Ⓦwww.bluesearentals.com.

Clubcars Áyios Nikólaos, Heraklion Airport and other locations in the east Ⓣ28410 25868, Ⓦwww.clubcars.net.

Kosmos Iráklion, Réthimnon, Haniá, Lasíthi; Ⓣ2810 241357, Ⓦwww.cosmos-sa.gr.

Motor Club Iráklion and resort locations Ⓣ2810 222408, Ⓦwww.motorclub.gr.

Motorbikes and mopeds

Motorbikes, mopeds, scooters and **quad bikes** are also widely available to rent in Crete, at prices starting at around €20 a day (€90 a week) for a 50cc moped, and €30 a day (€140 a week) for a 175cc trail bike. Reputable establishments demand a full motorcycle driving licence for any engine over 90cc (the law actually stipulates "over 50cc"), and you will usually have to leave your passport (sometimes a valid credit card is acceptable) as security. For smaller models any driving licence will do.

The smaller bikes and scooters – known in Greek as *papákia* (little ducks) after their characteristic noise – are ideal for pottering around for a day or two, but don't regard them as serious transport: Crete is very mountainous and the mopeds simply won't go up some of the steeper hills, even carrying only one person. Be sure not to run beyond the range of your petrol tank either, as they're not designed for long-distance travel and there are few filling stations outside the towns. For serious exploration, or to venture into the mountains, you really need a motorbike or a more powerful scooter.

Although motorbikes are enormous fun to ride around, you need to take more than usual care: there's an alarming number of accidents each year among visitors and locals because basic safety procedures are not followed. It's only too easy to come to grief on a potholed road or steep dirt track, especially at night. You should never rent a bike which you feel you can't handle, and always use a helmet (a legal requirement), despite the fact that many locals don't. All operators should have helmets (*kránio*), but you may have to ask for one; for reasons of comfort and hygiene some people now bring their own helmet with them. Quite apart from any injuries, you're likely to be charged a criminally high price for any repairs needed for the bike, so make sure that you are adequately insured, both in the rental agreement (which you should read carefully) and by your own travel insurance (see p.63). Note that many of these schemes specifically exclude injuries sustained while riding/driving a rented vehicle.

If you are thinking of touring Crete by motorbike, it's worth getting hold of a copy of *Unexplored Crete* (see p.462), which covers the island from a biker's viewpoint with suggested itineraries and details of many off-road tracks, along with helpful hints.

Walking, cycling and local boats

The idea of walking for pleasure is a recent arrival in Crete, but there are plenty of opportunities for visitors, from organized tours through the Samaria Gorge, to local strolls inland from almost any resort, to the challenging E4 trans-European footpath, which crosses the island from west to east. If you have the time and stamina, walking is probably the single best way to see the island. There are suggestions for hikes – from easy strolls to serious climbing – throughout the Guide. *Landscapes of Eastern Crete* and *Landscapes of Western Crete* (see "Books", p.462) make excellent further reading, and many of the websites on p.40 have information on walks too; for details of hikers' maps of Crete, see pp.65. Numerous organised walking holidays are available from tour operators, see pp.30–31 and p.34.

If you're planning any serious walking – including any of the various gorges – stout shoes or trainers are essential and walking boots with firm ankle support recommended, along with protection against the sun and adequate water supplies. Be aware also that paths are none too well marked, and even those that set out clear may peter out as you climb into the mountains – always try to get local advice before setting out on anything at all challenging. Crete also offers some exciting possibilities for climbers: contacts for the local mountaineering clubs (EOS) in Iráklion, Réthimnon and Haniá are given in their respective listings or see Ⓦ www.climbincrete.com.

Cycling

Cycling isn't greatly popular in Crete – not surprising, perhaps, in view of the mountainous terrain and fierce summer heat. Even so, riding a bike offers an incomparable view of the island and – if you're reasonably fit – guarantees contact with locals whom the average visitor could never meet. Mountain bikes can be rented in most resorts of any size, and many of the hire places will offer organized local excursions: there are also some package tours involving group exploration of the island by bike (see p.30 and p.34). If you're really keen you can also bring your own bike by plane (it's normally free within your ordinary baggage allowance) or by sea if you're coming from Italy or Athens (in which case it should go free on the ferry). On the island you may have difficulty with bus conductors – always protective of their luggage compartments – and cycle repair shops are hard to find outside the major towns of Iráklion, Réthimnon and Haniá, so bring as many spares as you think you'll need.

Boats and local ferries

Around the island numerous local ferry services run to offshore islets and isolated beaches; these are detailed throughout the Guide. Where there is no ferry service you can often arrange a trip by *kaïki* (small boat) with local fishermen. An enquiry at the bar in the nearest fishing village will usually turn up someone willing to make the trip – it's always worth trying to knock a bit off the first price quoted. In the resorts you may also be able to hire a boat, and some adventure travel operators offer tours around the coast by **sea kayak**.

Accommodation

There are vast numbers of beds available for tourists in Crete, and most of the year you can rely on turning up pretty much anywhere and finding something. At Easter and in July and August, however, you can run into problems unless you've booked in advance, especially in the more popular resorts and the towns of Iráklion, Haniá and Áyios Nikólaos. If you haven't booked ahead the best solution is to turn up early in the day and take whatever is on offer in the hope that you'll be able to exchange it for something better later.

The big **hotels** and self-catering complexes in the larger resorts are often pre-booked by package-holiday companies for the whole season. Although they may have vacancies if you just turn up, non-package visitors are far more likely to find themselves staying in smaller, simpler places which usually describe themselves simply as "**Rooms**", or as apartments or studios. Standards here can vary from spartan (though invariably clean) to luxurious, but the vast majority are purpose-built blocks where every room is en suite, and where the minimal furnishings are well adapted to the local climate – at least in summer. Many of these places close from October to April.

Hotels

The tourist police set official **categories** for hotels, which range from L (Luxury) down to E class; all except the top category have to keep within set price limits. Letter ratings correspond to the facilities available, a box-ticking exercise which doesn't always reflect the actual quality of the hotel, so try to take a look first. C- and D-class places (found mostly in towns) are reasonably priced and perfectly comfortable, costing €40–75 for a double room with bath and €30–60 for (rare) single rooms. A- or B-class hotels in town will be where business people stay, with all the usual facilities at €70–120 a room, while out of town these (and any L-class places) will often be beachside, with pools, tennis courts and the like.

Accommodation price codes

Throughout the book we've categorized accommodation according to the following price codes, which denote the cheapest available double room in high season. For apartments and villas, the price code refers to the price of the whole apartment, not just to a double room within the apartment.

Official prices for rooms and hotels should be displayed on the back of the door and you should never pay more than this: if you feel you're being overcharged at an officially registered place, threaten to go to the tourist police (who are very helpful in such cases). Usually stiff competition means you'll pay significantly less, and out of season room rates can drop by up to fifty percent, especially if you negotiate rates for a stay of three or more nights. Always be prepared to haggle. Single rooms, where available, cost around seventy percent of the price of a double.

①	€25 and under
②	€26–35
③	€36–45
④	€46–55
⑤	€56–65
⑥	€66–75
⑦	€76–110
⑧	€111–150
⑨	Over €150

Hot water and air-conditioning

When checking out a room, always ask about the status of hot water and air-conditioning. Most modern rooms and apartments have **air-conditioning**, but it's frequently an optional extra and you'll be charged an additional €5 or so a night to use it. Just occasionally you may also be asked to pay extra for **hot water**. A more likely problem is that there won't be enough: rooftop **solar heaters** are popular and effective, but shared solar-powered tanks tend to run out of hot water with the post-beach shower crunch around 6–7pm, with no more available until the next day. A heater, either as a backup or primary source, is more reliable; proprietors may either jealously guard the **boiler controls** or entrust you with their workings, which involves either a circuit breaker or rotary switch turned to "I" for fifteen minutes. Never shower with a *thermosífina* powered up (look for the glow-lamp indicator on the tank) – besides the risk of electric shock from badly earthed plumbing, you're likely to empty a smaller tank and burn out the heating element.

Rooms and apartments

Many places categorized as Apartments or Rooms are every bit as comfortable as hotels, and in the lower price ranges are usually more congenial and better value. At their most basic, rooms (*dhomátia* – but usually spotted by a "Rooms for Rent" or *Zimmer Frei* sign) might be literally a room in someone's house, a bare space with a bed and a hook on the back of the door, and washing facilities outside. However, these days almost all are purpose-built, with comfortable en-suite accommodation and balconies – at the fancier end of the scale you'll find studio and apartment complexes with marble floors, pools, bars and children's playgrounds. Many have a variety of rooms at different prices, so if possible always ask to see the room first. Places described as **studios** usually have a small kitchenette – a fridge, sink and a couple of hotplates in the room itself, with pans, cutlery and crockery normally provided – while **apartments** generally have at least one bedroom and separate kitchen/living room.

Prices can vary hugely, from €20 or less for a very basic place out of season, to €60–plus for high-season luxury in a resort. Single accommodation is rare, and much poorer value – you'll often have to pay the full double-room price or haggle for around a third off; on the other hand, **larger groups and families** can almost always find triple rooms, or studios and apartments with four or more beds, which work out at considerably less per head. Rooms proprietors usually ask to keep your passport: ostensibly "for the tourist police", but in reality to prevent you leaving with an unpaid bill. Some may be satisfied with just taking down the details, as in hotels, and they'll almost always return the documents once you get to know them, or if you need them for changing money. In the larger resorts the only way to keep hold of your passport may be to pay in advance.

Villas and longer term stays

Although one of the great dreams of Greek travel is finding that perfect coastal **villa** and renting it for virtually nothing for a whole month, there's no chance at all of your dream coming true in modern Crete. All the best villas are contracted out to agents and let through foreign operators. Even if you do find one empty for a week or two, renting it in Crete usually costs far more than it would have done to arrange from home (to arrange this, see the specialist operators on p.30 and p.34).

Having said that, if you arrive and decide you want to drop roots for a while, you can still strike lucky if you don't mind avoiding the coast altogether, and are happy with relatively modest accommodation. Pick an untouristed inland village – in the Amári valley, for example, up behind Paleohóra or inland from Réthimnon or Haniá – get yourself known and ask about; you might still pick up a wonderful deal. Out of season your chances are much better – even in touristy areas, between October and March (sometimes as late as April and May) you can bargain a very good rate, especially for stays of a month or more. Travel agents are another good source of information on what's available locally, and many rooms places have an apartment on the side or know someone with one to rent.

Another alternative is to rent an apartment in one of the larger towns. Most proprietors hope for longer-term tenants, but you might be able to strike a deal: look for a sign *Enoikhiázete* or check classified ads in the local papers.

Youth hostels

There are just three official and semi-official youth hostels (*xenón neótitas*) left on Crete, all of which must be among the least strictly run in the world. The surviving hostels are in Iráklion, Réthimnon and Plakiás; the last two are particularly good. Facilities are basic – you pay around €7–10 a night for a dormitory bed on which to spread your sleeping bag – but they usually offer cheap meals and/or kitchen facilities, a good social life and an excellent grapevine for finding work or travelling companions. They rarely ask to see a membership card, though if you want to be on the safe side, join your home country's hostelling association before you go.

A few of the downmarket hotels, especially in Iráklion and Haniá, are run on similar lines as unofficial hostels: here or from a sympathetic rooms or taverna proprietor, you may be able to negotiate roof space. Most Cretan buildings have flat concrete roofs on which to lay your sleeping bag and mattress. The nights are generally warm and the stars are stunning, though as this practice is now officially illegal and proprietors face losing their licence, it's becoming increasingly rare.

Camping

Official campsites in Crete are surprisingly scarce – see p.40 for a website with a list. On the whole they're not very good, tending to be either very large and elaborate (and full of camper vans) or else nothing more than a staked-out field. Although prices start at around €4 a night per person at the latter (and rise to at least double this at the more upmarket places), they mount up once you've added a charge for a tent (about €3 for a two-person model or €5 for something larger), and the same again for a vehicle and for everyone in your group – a basic room may represent better value, unless of course you're hankering for the great outdoors.

"Freelance camping" outside authorized campsites is also a dying tradition. For a start, it's illegal, and once in a while the law on this gets enforced. Also, the best sites are gradually being developed, which inevitably means turfing off the "undesirables" (and irresponsible campers have sometimes left otherwise scenic sites filthy). Nevertheless, with discretion and sensitivity it can still be done: the police crack down on people camping rough on (and littering) popular mainstream tourist beaches, but there are still places on the south coast where the practice is fairly common. The best plan is to find a sympathetic taverna near which to camp: if you eat there regularly they'll often be prepared to guard your gear during the day and let you take showers. If you do camp like this, however, take your rubbish away with you.

From May until early September it's warm enough to **sleep out** in just a lightweight sleeping bag (though the nights can be chilly in mountainous zones). A waterproof bag or groundsheet is useful to keep out the late summer damp, and a foam pad lets you sleep in relative comfort almost anywhere.

Eating and drinking

Cretans spend a lot of time socializing outside their homes, and sharing a meal is one of the chief ways of doing it. The atmosphere is almost invariably relaxed and informal, and expense-account prices are rare. Greeks are not prodigious drinkers – tippling is traditionally meant to accompany food – though there are plenty of bars in the tourist resorts and you can always get a beer, a glass of wine or an ouzo at a café.

While Greek food is not generally regarded as one of the world's great cuisines, at its best it can be delicious – fresh, simple and flavoured with the herbs that scent the countryside. The most common complaint is that food is often lukewarm and always oily. Both are deliberate, and any local will be happy to lecture you on the dangers of consuming too-hot food and on the life-enhancing properties of good olive oil. To get your food hot ask that it be served "*zestó*", and to get it with little or no oil stress "*horís ládhi*", although the fact remains that many foods are cooked in olive oil.

This oil obsession has some justification, as the island's extremely healthy diet, based on wheat, olive and grapes (the so-called Mediterranean diet) has led to its having one of the longest-lived and least diseased populations in the world. In the countryside, and in the better town tavernas, the food may be plain, but its ingredients will be fresh and local and often naturally organic; most Cretans have access to a smallholding of some kind, or if not, to local markets where the island's excellent agricultural produce is sold.

Breakfast, fast food and snacks

Greeks generally don't eat much in the way of breakfast, so this is not a meal normally served in regular Cretan bars and restaurants. Don't despair though – if your hotel doesn't offer it, all the major resorts have plenty of places offering a choice of English or Continental starts to your day. For something more authentic and better value, search out instead a *galaktopoleío* (milk bar), which serve puddings and yoghurt (many *kafenía* also serve yoghurt with honey), or a *zaharoplastío* (patisserie) for gorgeously sweet and syrupy cakes and pastries. A combination *galaktozaharopolío* (quite a mouthful in every sense) is not uncommon.

At bakeries, you'll find oven-warm flaky pies filled with feta cheese (*tirópita*), with spinach or wild greens (*spanakópita* or *hortópita*), sausage (*louhanikópita*) or, better still, *bougátsa*, filled with creamy cheese and sprinkled with sugar. In the tourist areas many of the bakeries now cater for northern European palates by turning out croissants, doughnuts and even wholemeal (*olikís*) and rye (*sikalísio*) breads.

Ubiquitous fast-food snacks include *souvláki* – small kebabs most commonly in the form of the doner-kebab type *yíros* píta or chunks of *píta-souvláki*, stuffed into a doughy bread (more like Indian naan than pita bread) along with salad and yoghurt, and quite superb. You'll also find places serving pizza – usually excellent at specialist places and awful in tavernas – and *tost* – bland ham-and-cheese toasties; but avoid Cretan hamburgers at all costs.

For a food and drink glossary, see p.475–7.

Tavernas and restaurants

Most Cretan restaurants describe themselves as tavernas, though you can also get a meal at an *estiatório* or a *psistariá* as well as in *ouzerís* and many others. *Estiatória* are very similar to tavernas but tend to be simpler and less expensive, perhaps more traditionally Greek. *Psistariés* are restaurants that specialize in fresh prepared plates – predominantly grilled meat but often good vegetables too. A *psarótaverna* is a taverna which specializes in fish. *Ouzerís* (the same in the Greek plural – we've added "s" for clarity) are bars specializing in ouzo and *mezedhés*. They are well worth trying for the marvellous variety of *mezedhés* (small plates of food) they serve, although the most authentic are to be found in the larger towns and resorts where there's a large enough customer base to keep them on their toes. At the better places several plates of *mezedhés* will effectively substitute for a meal (though it may not work out any cheaper if you have a healthy appetite; and *mezedhés* are also served at many tavernas). Wherever you eat, chic appearance is not always a good guide to quality; often the most basic place will turn out to be the best, and in swankier restaurants you may well be paying for the linen and stemmed wine glasses.

Sometimes at traditional tavernas and *estiatória* there's no menu and you're taken into the kitchen to inspect what's on offer: uncooked cuts of meat and fish, simmering pots of stew or vegetables, trays of baked foods. Even where there is a menu (usually in English as well as Greek) it's often a standard printed form that bears little relation to what is actually on offer: again, check the kitchen or display case.

A basic taverna meal with house wine or beer will cost around e11–15 per person. Add a better bottle of wine, seafood or more careful cooking, and it could be up to e18–24 a head; you'll rarely pay more than that. If you're unsure about the price of something, ask before ordering since it always seems to turn out more expensive if you wait until after you've eaten. Fish is almost always priced by weight, and is usually very expensive. All restaurants and tavernas must by law display a written menu with prices, taxes and service charges (if any). At the end of the meal you are entitled by law to a bill (check), but these often only state the grand total and don't always itemize the individual dishes. There's always a small cover charge, which includes the bread you'll inevitably be given. You can always ask for an itemized bill, but as this will often be scribbled in illegible Greek script, it may not be much help. Though most places in Crete are honest, if you think you're being hoodwinked get the waiter or manager to explain in detail what you are being asked to pay for. If you're still not satisfied the local tourist office will often be willing to take up your claim, or you could try the tourist police, who are usually sympathetic. Taxes and service are normally included in the prices of the dishes in most restaurants and tavernas so, unless you're feeling overwhelmingly expansive, a tip of five percent will suffice.

Cretans generally eat late: lunch is served at 2–3pm, dinner at 9–11pm. You can eat earlier than this, but you're likely to get indifferent service at a tourist establishment or find yourself eating alone everywhere else. If you find that you can't wait that long, do what the locals do: take an aperitif along with a few *mezédhes*.

Ten great tavernas

There are some wonderful restaurants and tavernas across the island and, regrettably, quite a few that could do better. The best experiences are invariably unexpected – turning up at some village taverna to find a party going on, or a local dish, freshly made, served as if to a member of the family. In our view, though, the places below, ranked in no particular order, have proved consistently excellent in terms of quality, value, ambience and welcome.

Pagopiion Iráklion (p.99)
Creta Hersónisos (p.124)
El Greco Lendas (p.156)
Pelagos Áyios Nikólaos (p.180)
Aiolus Pahiá Ámmos (p.191)
To Pigadi Réthimnon (p.245)
O Kipos Tis Arkoúdainas Episkopí (p.253)
Akrogiali Haniá (p.313)
Karnáyio Haniá (p.313)
Caravella Paleohóra (p.391)

Greek dishes and Cretan specialities

As Cretan restaurants increasingly adapt themselves to tourists, you'll find that some of the advice below on traditional Greek foods and restaurants no longer applies in the resorts, where you're more likely to get western European–style service (places much patronized by the French, for example, offer fixed-price set menus). On the other hand, the better tavernas have started to recognize the value of their culture and serve more consciously traditional foods in traditional ways – usually excellent.

A typical Greek meal consists of appetizers and a main meat or fish dish, often brought to the table at much the same time as there's no strict concept of courses here – if you want the main course later, stagger your ordering. Only the tourist restaurants serve much in the way of dessert, though there's often fresh fruit or yoghurt – the Greek practice is to visit a *zaharoplastío* for pastries, coffee and liqueurs once the main meal is over.

The most interesting starters are also often served as *mezédhes* from which you can make up a meal. They include tzatziki (yoghurt, garlic and cucumber dip), *melitzanosaláta* (aubergine/eggplant dip), *kolokythákia tiganitá* (courgette/zucchini slices fried in batter) or *melitzánes tiganités* (aubergine/eggplant slices fried in batter), *yígandes* (white haricot beans in tomato sauce), *dolmádhes* (vine leaves stuffed with herby rice), *tyropitákia* or *spanakópites* (small cheese and spinach pies), *okhtapódhi* (octopus) and *dákos* (a traditional Cretan bruschetta-like dish, of tomatoes and feta on a hard rusk).

The main dish of meat or fish generally comes on its own except for maybe a piece of lemon or half a dozen chips (fries); lamb (*arní*), where available, is usually the best meat, local and excellent, if a little pricier than the alternatives. Check out the kitchen for oven-baked casserole dishes such as moussaká or *pastítsio* (macaroni and minced meat), meat or game stews like *kokinistó*, *stifádho* or simply *arní me patátes* (lamb with potatoes), and *yemistá* (stuffed tomatoes or peppers), which are generally delicious and less expensive than straight meat or fish dishes. **Salads and vegetables** are served as separate dishes and usually shared. If you ask for salad you'll invaribaly be brought *horiátiki saláta* – the so-called Greek **salad**, including feta cheese: wonderful as it is there are plenty of cheaper alternatives such as *domatosaláta* (tomatoes only), *angourodomáta saláta* (tomato and cucumber), *Láhano-karóto saláta* (cabbage-carrot) or *maroúli* (lettuce). Vegetable dishes (such as *fasolákia*, green beans cooked in a tomato sauce) are often very good in themselves and, if you order a few between several people, can make a satisfying meal.

In season, fish is varied and delicious, but in summer visitors get a relatively poor choice: most of what is on offer is frozen, farmed or imported from Egypt and North Africa as trawling is prohibited from the end of May until the beginning of October. During these warmer months, such few fish as are caught tend to be smaller and dry-tasting. Taverna owners often comply only minimally with the requirement to indicate when seafood is frozen (look for the abbreviation "*kat*" on the Greek-language side of the menu), so don't look too disparagingly at the solitary sea-front taverna that tells the truth: the others may prefer to leave you in ignorance. All that said, there are quite a few excellent fish tavernas across the island, and although seafood can be relatively expensive it's still a bargain compared with typical northern European restaurant prices. And if the prices on the menu seem phenomenally high, that's generally because they are per kilo; most tavernas will encourage you to go into the kitchen to see what's available and when you've selected your fish they'll weigh it to determine the actual price (don't leave it to the waiter, or you'll get the biggest). An average portion of whitefish should weigh in the region of 200–300g. Some Cretan favourites are *sargós* (white bream), *skorpídi* (scorpion fish), *barbounía* (red mullet), *fangrí* (common sea bream) and *skáros* (parrotfish), a tasty white fish which is eaten whole. The least expensive consistently available fish are *gopés* (bogue), *atherína* (sand smelts) and *maridhés* (picarel), eaten head and all, best rolled in salt and sprinkled with lemon juice. The island's **kakaviá**, a fish soup flavoured with lemon, wild onions and herbs, can be a fabulous treat. **Squid** (*kalamária*), or better still baby squid (*kalamarákia*), octopus and shellfish tend to be cheaper and are invariably delicious.

Vegetarians

If you're vegetarian, you can eat extremely well in Crete. Quite apart from the fact that meals based on pizza or pasta are available in all the towns and resorts, as are traditional snacks like *tirópita*, the increased interest in local cuisine, as well as pressure from tourists, has seen far more vegetable dishes appear on local menus. Many *mezédhes* like tzatziki, *dolmádhes* and *yígandes* are naturally meat free; you'll find excellent salads everywhere, *yémista* (stuffed vegetables) are usually meat-free and there are frequently vegetable baked dishes like ratatouille-like *briam*, *imam bayaldi* (stuffed aubergine/eggplant) and *bouréki* (potato, courgette/zucchini and cheese bake) on the menu.

Traditional Cretan specialities increasingly find their way onto menus too: some of the more common among dozens of typical dishes are snails (*tsalingária*) and rabbit (*kounéli*), both often served as a *stifádho* (stewed with onions). Look out too for *kalitsounia* (savoury stuffed pastries). Another speciality you also shouldn't miss if you get a chance is *hórta* – the wild greens that grow in abundance on the Cretan hills. These are gathered and boiled to be served up lukewarm (or sometimes cold), dressed with olive oil and vinegar, and can be delicious – or at the very least good for you. Although you can eat them all year round, spring and autumn are the best times, when they grow vigorously in the damper climate.

Self-catering

Stores and markets open very early and yoghurt, bread, eggs or fruit, as well as picnic foods like cheese, salami, olives and tomatoes are always easy to buy. Remember that Greek cheese isn't all feta (salty white sheep's cheese) and, if you ask, there are some remarkably tasty local Cretan varieties: try *mitizíthra*, *káskavali*, *kritiko* or *graviéra*, the last a peppery, mature, full-fat sheep's cheese. Unfortunately, they're all surprisingly expensive. Beach picnics can be further supplemented by tinned foods such as tuna, stuffed vine leaves (*dolmádhes*) or baby squid (*kalamarákia*).

Fruit is wonderful, and seasonal fruits are exceptionally inexpensive – look out for what's on offer in the markets or by the roadside: cherries in spring; melons, watermelons, plums and apricots in summer; pears and apples in autumn; oranges and grapes most of the time. They even grow small bananas in the area around Mália – an endeavour heavily subsidized by the EU.

Drinking

For ordinary drinking you go to a *kafenío* – a simple Greek coffee shop or café usually filled with old men arguing and playing *távli* or backgammon, a national obsession (most places will lend you a set). They start the day selling coffee (*kafé*) until this is gradually replaced by ouzo (an aniseed-flavoured spirit, drunk neat or mixed with water). Later still, brandy is served (usually Metaxa or Botrys, graded with three, five or seven stars – you'll be hard pressed to tell the difference) or *raki*, a burningly strong, flavourless spirit also known in Crete as *tsípouro* or *tsikoudhiá*. **Raki** is also Greece's great ice-breaker and the symbol of the hand of friendship being extended: wherever you're offered one you're being honoured, so it's polite to accept even if you have to force it down. Outside the major towns, most *raki* will be homemade – stills are everywhere in the countryside, especially the mountains. Cretans pride themselves on being able to detect the most subtle distinctions in taste and quality of one brew against another. Ouzo and other drinks are traditionally served with small snacks – *mezédhes* (see p.49) – nowadays you generally have to order and pay for these, though in country districts you may be pleasantly surprised at the generosity of many *kafenía*.

Traditional Greek coffee is what most Westerners would call "Turkish", tiny cups filled with a thick, black, heady concoction. It makes a great start to the day or a pick-me-up later – once you've acquired the taste and learned to leave the grounds behind in the cup. Most Cretans drink it medium-sweet or *métrio*; if you want no sugar at all, ask for *skéto*, while *glikó* is very sweet indeed. If this is what you want, ask for a *kafé ellinikós*

– many Cretan *kafenío* proprietors assume foreigners will want ordinary coffee (usually instant), so by choosing it you'll rise greatly in their estimation. The more fashionable cafés now also serve cappuccinos and the like, and above all the universal summer drink of the young, **frappé**. This is simply instant coffee and iced water, whizzed to a froth and always served with a glass of cold water: but it is infinitely better than that makes it sound, and the quintessential taste of a Greek summer. Again, you can have it *skéto*, *métrio* or *glikó* and with milk (*me gála*) or without.

Tea (*tsá*) is often available too, usually served black with lemon (*me lemóni*; you'll have to ask for milk, *gála*, if you want it) and in more fashinable places you'll find a range of herbal teas, including Cretan dittany (*díktamos*), an infusion made from the leaves of a plant unique to the island and used by the ancients as a medicinal panacea.

Real bars are rare in traditional Crete, though occasionally you'll find an *ouzerí*, which differs little from a *kafenío*. You can get a beer or glass of wine at almost any time in any café or taverna, though, and the modern cafés that proliferate in the major towns and cities generally become bars by night. In the resorts bars for tourists tend to be either staid affairs where you can sit outside in cushioned armchairs sipping expensive, umbrella-decorated cocktails, or hectic, crowded disco-bars serving less exotic but even more expensive concoctions.

Cretan wine

Wine is the usual accompaniment to a meal in a restaurant or taverna. If you don't specify what you want, you'll be served the **house wine**, traditionally poured cold from the barrel into tin jugs (*kantária*) or carafes in either kilo (litre) or half-kilo measures. Frequently such wine is homemade and a source of great pride: it can be excellent, it's invariably interesting and it's always inexpensive. The homemade stuff is most frequently brownish-pink *kókkino* (red), especially good around Kastélli in the west or Sitía in the east, while *áspro* (white) often has a distinctive sherry-like tang, and again a brownish tinge. If it's not homemade it is likely to be from a wine box or barrel produced by one of the big co-ops, and is almost always perfectly palatable – which is often more than can be said for the few bottles of wine stored on a hot, dusty shelf in the average taverna. If you want to taste the house wine before committing yourself to a *karáfa*, this should never be a problem.

With the increase in tourism and a new breed of fancier restaurants has come a demand for a more polished product, however, and in recent years Hellenic wines have vastly improved to cater to this demand, as have the wine lists at the better tavernas. **Cretan wines** come in many varieties; the hot, dry summers are more suited to producing dry red wines – dark and powerful – than whites. Six grape varieties predominate on the island – *kotsifáli*, *thrapsathíri*, *liátiko*, *mandilariá*, *roméïko* and *vilána* – and there are four appellation wine-growing areas: Pezá, Dafnés, Sitía and Arhánes, the last still using some vineyards cultivated by the Minoans almost four thousand years ago.

Pezá brands like Minos red and white, which you can get everywhere, are palatable if rather boring, although the more mature vintages such as Minos Sant Antonio and Palace VDQS (red and white) are getting much better. The **Arhánes** wine region also produces some pretty good red and white vintages, most notably by a co-operative which sells its wines under the Arhánes brand name. The **Sitian** wines Topiko (medium-dry with a hint of sherry) and Myrtos are both good everyday whites to drink with seafood. In the west, Kissamos red is another good bet. Some of the island's smaller producers also make excellent wines, especially Lyrarakis from the Pezá region, whose *kotsifáli*-and-syrah red, Dafni dry white and Last Supper red are all excellent. Michalakis is another Pezá producer whose Merastri brand is pretty tasty. To the west, near Haniá, Manoulakis and Karabitakis are two more small producers turning out wines of high quality.

Retsína is also produced locally, and though not as popular here as on the mainland (it was largely unknown in Crete before World War II), is always available. This resinated wine, which usually comes in half-litre bottles, is an acquired taste, but some varieties are extremely good (particularly those produced by the Central Union of Haniá Wine Producers). It's also exceptionally cheap: a half-litre generally costs less than €1 in the supermarket, much the same as a half-litre of beer.

As for wines produced elsewhere in Greece, keep an eye out for those from **Santorini** (Thíra), the volcanic island to the north, especially premium whites such as *Ktima Arghyrou* and *Boutari Nykhteri.* Almost anything produced on **Límnos** is also decent. Many of Greece's better known **mainland wines** are also available on the island and worth looking out for. Good reds include *Porto Carras*, and the cabernet-merlot blend from Ktima Tselepou. Andonopoulou, Ktima Papaïoannou Nemea, and Tsantali Rapsani are all superb, velvety reds – and likely to be found only in the better tavernas or *káves* (bottle shops). Antonopoulos, Tselepos, Spyropoulos and Papaïoannou also do excellent whites, especially the Spyropoulos Orino Mantinia. Other premium brands on the mainland include the overrated Hatzimihali, outstanding Dhiamandákou, Athanasiadhi, Skouras and Lazaridhi (especially their superb Merlots). For any of these you can expect to pay €8–11 per bottle in a shop, double that at a taverna.

Last but not least, CAIR on Rhodes makes its very own "**champagne**" ("naturally sparkling wine fermented en boteille", says the label), in both brut and demi-sec versions. It's not Krug by any means, but at less than €6 per bottle, who's complaining?

Beer

Beer comes as standard European lager served in half-litre bottles or smaller cans. Locally brewed Amstel, Henninger and Heineken as well as imported Lowenbräu are the staples, or there's Greek Mythos. Beware of exotic brands or gold-trimmed bottles served by bars in tourist areas – the mark-up on these is usually outrageous.

The media

Cretans are great devourers of newsprint – although few would describe Greek media as a paradigm of responsible or objective journalism. Papers are almost uniformly sensational, whilst state-run TV and radio are often biased in favour of whichever party happens to be in government.

Newspapers

British newspapers are widely available in resorts and the larger towns for €1.75–2.50, or €3–4 for Sunday editions. Many, including the *Guardian*, *Mail* and *Mirror*, have slimmed-down editions printed in Europe which are available the same day in the bigger resorts; others are likely to be a day old. In bigger newsagents you'll also be able to find *USA Today*, *Time* and *Newsweek* as well as the *International Herald Tribune*, which has the bonus of including an abridged English edition of the same day's *Kathimerini*, a respected Greek daily, thus allowing you to keep up with Greek news too. From time to time you'll also find various English-language magazines aimed at visitors to Crete, though none seem to survive for long.

Radio

The mountainous nature of Crete means that any sort of radio reception is tricky: if you're driving around you'll find that you constantly have to retune. The airwaves are cluttered with **local and regional stations**, though, many of which have plenty of music, often traditional. Some of these also have regular news bulletins and tourist information in English. For international news and other programming in English, the BBC World Service can be picked up on shortwave (currently on 5.87, 6.19, 7.32, 9.41 and 12.09 MHz; consult ⓦwww.bbc.co.uk/worldservice for frequencies). Voice of America, with its transmitters on Rhodes, can be picked up at the eastern end of the island on medium wave, while in the extreme east around Zákros you can often receive crystal-clear BBC domestic radio programmes on FM, disseminated from the British base on Cyprus.

TV

Greece's state-funded **TV stations**, ET1, NET and ET3, nowadays lag behind private channels – Antenna, Star, Alpha, Alter and Kriti TV – in the ratings, though not necessarily in quality of offerings. Most foreign films and serials are broadcast in their original language, with Greek subtitles; there's almost always a choice of English-language movies from about 9pm onwards, although the closer you get to the end of the movie, the more adverts you'll encounter. Although hotels and rooms places frequently have TVs in the room, reception is often dire: even where they advertise satellite, the only English-language channels this usually includes are CNN and BBC World.

Festivals and cultural events

Most of the big Greek popular festivals have a religious basis, so they're observed in accordance with the Orthodox calendar: this means that Easter, for example, can fall as much as three weeks to either side of the Western festival.

On top of the main religious festivals, there are scores of local festivals, or *paniyíria*, celebrating the patron saint of the village church. With some 330-odd possible saints' days you're unlikely to travel round for long without stumbling on something. Local tourist offices should be able to fill you in on events in their area.

Easter

Easter is by far the most important festival of the Greek year – much more so than Christmas – and taken way more seriously than anywhere in the West apart from, perhaps, southern Spain. From Wednesday of Holy Week, the radio and TV networks are given over solely to religious programmes until the following Monday. It is an excellent time to be in Crete, both for the beautiful and moving religious ceremonies and for the days of feasting and celebration which follow. If you make for a smallish village, you may well find yourself an honorary member for the period of the festival. This is a busy time for Greek tourists as well as international ones, so book ahead: for Easter dates, see p.68.

The first great ceremony takes place on Good Friday evening as the Descent from the Cross is lamented in church. At dusk, the *Epitáfios*, Christ's funeral bier, lavishly decorated by the women of the parish, leaves the sanctuary and is paraded solemnly through the streets. Late Saturday evening sees the climax in a majestic Mass to celebrate Christ's triumphant return. At the stroke of midnight all the lights in each crowded church are extinguished and the congregation plunged into the darkness which enveloped Christ as He passed through the underworld. Then there's a faint glimmer of light behind the altar screen before the priest appears, holding aloft a lighted taper and chanting "*Avtó to fos…*" ("This is the Light of the World"). Stepping down to the level of the parishioners, the priest lights the unlit candles of the nearest worshippers, intoning "*Dévte, lévete Fós*" ("Come, take the Light"). Those at the front of the congregation do the same for their neighbours until the entire church – and the outer courtyard, standing room only for latecomers – is ablaze with burning candles and the miracle reaffirmed.

This is the signal for celebrations to start and, in many Cretan villages, for effigies of Judas to be burned. The traditional greeting, as fireworks and dynamite explode all around

Easter's holy flame – a pagan rite?

The flame from which all the Easter candles are lit has its source at Christ's Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem; here the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox church celebrates the ceremony of the Holy Fire each Holy Saturday. From Jerusalem the flame is transported on a special flight to Athens, and within hours distributed by land, sea and air to churches throughout Greece and the islands.

These ceremonies around the rebirth of light closely mirror the ancient Greek worship of Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of the earth. In legend, Persephone was banished to the darkness of Hades for the winter, returning joyously to the light of day every spring.

you in the street, is *Khristós Anésti* ("Christ is risen"), to which the response is *Alithós Anésti* ("Truly He is risen"). In the week up to Easter Sunday people wish each other *Kaló Páskha* ("Happy Easter"); on or after the day, you say *Khrónia Pollá* ("Many happy returns").

If you have the inclination to listen, the chanting from midnight to 2am in the half-empty churches is actually the most beautiful part of the Resurrection liturgy, unmarred by high explosives. Most worshippers, however, have long since taken the burning **candles** home through the streets; they are said to bring good fortune to the house if they arrive still burning. On reaching the front door it is common practice to make the sign of the cross on the lintel with the flame, leaving a black smudge visible for the rest of the year. The forty-day **Lenten fast** from all animal products – still observed by the devout and in rural areas – is traditionally broken in the early hours of Sunday morning with a meal of *mayerítsa*, a soup made from lamb tripe, rice, dill and lemon. The rest of the lamb is roasted on a spit for Sunday lunch.

The Greek equivalent of **Easter eggs** are hard-boiled eggs (painted red on Holy Thursday), which are baked into twisted, sweet bread-loaves (*tsourékia*) or distributed on Easter Sunday. People rap their eggs against their friends' eggs, and the owner of the last uncracked egg is considered lucky. In many remote locales, the most revered local icons spend the week after Easter in a slow procession around the district or icon, "visiting" each church (and sometimes each house) to bring luck.

Local entertainments

The events of the various festivals aside (and Iráklion's lasts for much of the summer), organized entertainment on the island is limited. Dancing is of course a tradition here as throughout Greece; the stuff put on for tourists is enjoyable, but may not be entirely authentic. For the real thing you have to go to a *paniyíri*, or else be exceptionally lucky in falling into the right company, which may just get you an invite to a wedding feast – an event unlikely to be soon forgotten. With regard to music, keep an eye out in the villages for posters advertising *lyra* and *laoúto* (lute or Cretan *bouzoúki*) concerts. The *lyra* is Crete's "national" instrument: a three-stringed violin made from mulberry or maple which is propped on the knee and played with a small bow. These events can be highly entertaining, and you'll often be the only foreigner present, thus ensuring a warm Cretan welcome. For more on Cretan music, see p.464–8.

Name days

In Crete, everyone gets to celebrate their birthday twice. More important, in fact, than your actual birthday is the "**name day**" of the saint that bears the same name. Greek ingenuity has stretched the saints' names (or invented new saints) to cover almost everyone, so even pagan Dionysos or Socrates get to celebrate. If your name isn't covered, no problem – your party is on All Saints' Day, eight weeks after Easter.

The big name-day celebrations (Iannis/Ianna on January 7th or Yioryios on April 23rd, for example) can involve thousands of people, and traditional naming conven-

The festival year

Epiphany (Jan 6). The hobgoblins who run riot on earth during the twelve days of Christmas are rebanished to the nether world by various rites of the Church. Most important of these is the blessing of baptismal fonts and all outdoor bodies of water. At lake or seashore locales the priests cast a crucifix into the deep to be recovered by crowds of young men. There used to be a substantial cash prize for the winner, but this has mostly been replaced by lesser value victory tokens owing to serious violence between contenders.

Pre-Lenten carnivals. These span three weeks, climaxing over the seventh weekend before Easter.

Clean Monday (Khatará Dheftéra). The beginning of Lent, a traditional time to fly kites and to feast on all the things which will be forbidden over the coming weeks.

Independence Day and the **Feast of the Annunciation (March 25)**. Parades and dancing to celebrate the beginning of the revolt against Turkish rule in 1821 combined with church services to honour the news being given to Mary that she was to become the mother of Christ. There are special celebrations in Paleohóra.

The Feast of St George (April 23). Áyios Yeóryios is the patron saint of shepherds, and big rural celebrations are held throughout Crete with much feasting and dancing. There's a major celebration in Asigonía (near Réthimnon).

May Day. The great urban holiday – most people make for the countryside to picnic. In the towns demonstrations by the left claim the day, *Ergatikí Protomayiá* (Working-Class First of May), as their own.

Battle of Crete (May 20–27). The anniversary of the battle is celebrated in Haniá and a different local village each year, with veterans' ceremonies, sporting events and folk dancing.

Áyios Konstandínos (May 21). The feast of St Constantine (the first Byzantine Orthodox ruler) and his mother, Ayía Eléni (St Helena), with services and celebrations at churches and monasteries named after the saint, especially Arkádhi.

Summer Solstice/John the Baptist (June 24). Bonfires and widespread celebrations.

Naval Week (late June). Naval celebrations culminate in fireworks – especially big at Soúdha.

Réthimnon Wine Festival (July). A week of wine tasting and traditional dancing.

Iráklion Festival (July & Aug). A wide variety of cultural events from drama and film to traditional dance and jazz, at scattered sites through most of the summer.

Metamórfosi/Transfiguration (Aug 6). Another excuse for feasting. Specially celebrated in Voukoliés (Haniá), Máles (Ierápetra) and Zákros.

tions guarantee that families get to celebrate together. In most families the eldest boy is still named after his paternal grandfather, and the eldest girl after her grandmother, so all the eldest cousins will share the same name and the same name day. Any church or chapel bearing the saint's name will mark the event – some smaller chapels will open just for this one day of the year – while if an entire village is named after the saint, you can almost guarantee a festival. To check out when your name day falls, see Ⓦwww.sfakia-crete.com.

Áyios Matthaíos (Aug 12). The feast of St Matthew, with special celebrations in Kastélli Kissámou.

Sitía Sultana Festival (mid-Aug). An enjoyable, week-long celebration of the local harvest, with plenty of wine.

Assumption of the Virgin (Aug 15). Celebrated in towns and villages throughout Crete, the great feast of the *Apokímisis tís Panayías* is a day when people traditionally return to their home village, often creating problems for unsuspecting visitors who find there's no accommodation left. Services in churches begin at dawn, but latecomers usually arrive for the *psomí*, *arní*, and *krasí* (bread, lamb and wine), served in the churchyard at the end of the service around lunchtime. Neápoli is a main centre for this feast, though the great event is the pilgrimage to the island of Tínos.

Áyios Eftíhios (Aug 24). Celebrations of this saint's day are especially fervent in the southwest corner of the island, where many infants are given his name; there are special festivities at Kambanós near Soúyia (Haniá).

Áyios Títos (Aug 25). The patron saint of Crete – celebrated all across the island and with a big procession in Iráklion.

Cretan Wedding (late Aug). A "traditional" wedding laid on in Kritsá for the tourists – quite a spectacle nonetheless.

Áyios Ioánnis (Aug 29). A massive name-day pilgrimage to the church of Áyios Ioánnis Giónis on the Rodhópou peninsula in Haniá.

Áyios Stavrós/Holy Cross (Sept 14). Special festivities at Tzermiádho and Kalamáfka.

Mihaíl Arhángelos (Oct 11). The feast of the archangel is especially popular at Potamiés (Lasíthi).

Chestnut Festival (mid-Oct). Celebrated in Élos and other villages of the southwest where chestnuts are grown.

Óhi Day (Oct 28). Lively national holiday, with parades and folk dancing, commemorating Prime Minister Metaxas' one-word reply ("No") to Mussolini's ultimatum in 1940.

Arkádhi (Nov 7–9). One of Crete's biggest gatherings celebrates the anniversary of the explosion at the monastery of Arkádhi.

Áyios Nikólaos (Dec 6). The feast of the patron saint of seafarers. Many chapels are dedicated to him around the island's coastline, including the one at the resort named after him, where processions and festivities mark the day.

Travelling with children

Children are worshipped and indulged in Crete, arguably to excess, and travelling with them presents few problems – wherever you go, your kids will be welcome. As elsewhere in the Mediterranean, children are not segregated from adults at mealtimes, and early on in life are inducted into the typical late-night routine – you'll see plenty of kids at tavernas, expected to eat (and up to their capabilities, talk) like adults.

While there's not much in the way of specifically child-oriented holidays to Crete – no club hotels or the like – many hotels and newer apartment complexes have children's pools and small playgrounds, and most tour operators will be able to book you something suitable. Some of the fancier resort hotels have their own beaches, with watersports on site. Almost all hotels and rooms places will have three- and four-bed rooms (or can add a cot to a regular room, at minimal or no extra cost), and many places have small apartments with fridges and simple cooking facilities, which can make life easier. There are several water parks along the north coast (notably at Hersónisos, p.122, Anópoli, p.120 and Haniá, p.317), and activities like gorge-hiking or boat trips can become real adventures (though don't be overambitious; they can also be really gruelling in the heat). For younger kids, "Happy Train" rides operate in and around many of the major towns and resorts. Under-18s get **free entry** into state-run museums and archeological sites, and reduced prices at most attractions.

Baby foods and nappies (diapers) are readily available and reasonably priced; private rooms establishments and luxury hotels are more likely to offer some kind of babysitting service than the mid-range, C-class hotels.

Travel essentials

Costs

The cost of living in Greece has increased dramatically since it joined the EU, subsequently adopting the euro and increasing its VAT rate. Food prices in shops, or a cappuccino in a fancy café, now cost at least as much as in most other EU countries (including the UK). Nonetheless, your needs are simple here and public transport, accommodation and taverna meals are among the less inflated items.

Average costs

Prices depend very much on where and when you go. The cities and major resorts are usually more expensive, and costs increase substantially in July, August and at Easter. Solo travellers, of course, invariably spend more than if they were sharing food and rooms.

A budget of €50/£32/$65 a day will get you a share of a plain double room with bath or shower, breakfast, a picnic or simple taverna lunch, bus ride, museum tickets, a couple of beers and a decent evening meal. You could save a bit on this by camping or staying in hostels and catering for yourself, while for €70–80/£45–55/$90–105 you could upgrade your room, squeeze in a few extra drinks, and share the rental of a motorbike or small car.

For accommodation, you should normally be able to find a comfortable room for two for around €40 a night – often significantly less out of season or in rural locations. High season in the big coastal resorts, however, might push the minimum up a little. For more details see "Accommodation", p.45.

A solid taverna meal, even with considerable quantities of local wine, rarely works out much above €11–15 a head, though going for a classier restaurant with an "international" menu or eating seafood in a touristy place could easily mean you'll pay double that.

Buses on Crete are still fairly inexpensive, although fares are rising. **Car rental** prices start from around €30 a day. See "Getting around", p.41 for more information.

Bargaining

Although prices are fixed in shops and for most tours and the like, **bargaining** is rarely seen as offensive and will very frequently pay off. This is particularly true when looking at rooms: off-season, even a moment's hesitation is likely to bring an improved offer, or another room at a lower price. Similarly, there's almost always a "discount" available on vehicle, motorbike and scooter rental, especially in low season or when you are renting for longer periods.

Entrance fees

Entry charges for archeological sites and museums vary from €2 to around €6 for an important site such as Knossós. State-run sites offer **free entry** to under-18s, senior citizens, students, teachers and journalists from the EU with proper identification, and substantial reductions for other nationalities; private attractions may also offer reduced prices, especially for children. In addition, entrance to state-run sites and museums is **free** on Sundays and public holidays outside of the peak season from November to March. See also sections on Travelling with children“ (p.57) and student and youth travellers (p.70).

Crime and personal safety

Crete, along with Greece as a whole, remains one of Europe's safest regions, with a low crime rate and a deserved reputation for honesty. If you leave a bag or wallet at a café, you'll most likely find it scrupulously looked after, pending your return. Similarly, locals are relaxed about leaving possessions unlocked or unattended on the beach, in rooms or on campsites.

Recent years have seen an increase in crime, however, and it makes sense not to take chances and to lock rooms and cars securely, treating Greece like any other European destination.

Police and potential offences

Though the chances are you'll never meet a member of the national **police force**, the *Elliniki Astynomia*, Greek cops expect respect: in Crete, on the whole, they're pretty laid-back, but they can be harsh if you cross them, and many have little regard for foreigners. Police practice often falls short of northern European norms. If you need to go to the police, always try to do so through the Tourist Police (☎171), who should speak English and are used to dealing with visitors.

You are required to **carry suitable ID** on you at all times (except when in bathing costume) – either a passport or a driving licence. Otherwise, the most common causes of a brush with authority are nude bathing or sunbathing, camping outside an authorized site, public inebriation or lewd behaviour, and taking photos in forbidden areas.

Nude bathing is legal on only a very few beaches, and is deeply offensive to the more traditional Greeks – exercise considerable sensitivity to local feeling where you are. Never, for example, swim or sunbathe nude within sight of a church, of which there are many along the coast. Generally, if a beach has become established as naturist, or is well secluded, nobody minds much. Police will only be summoned if nudity is getting too overt on mainstream tourist stretches. Mostly it might result in a warning, but you can be arrested and face three days in jail and a stiff fine. **Topless (sun)bathing** for women is technically legal, but again may be offensive to locals in small villages – some post signs asking you not to.

Similar guidelines apply to **camping rough**, which has been illegal nationwide since 1977. Even for this you're still unlikely to incur anything more than a warning to move on. The only real risk of arrest is if you are told to move and fail to do so. If the police do take any action against you, it's more likely to be a brief spell in their cells than any official prosecution.

The **hours between 3 and 5pm**, the midday *mikró ípno* (siesta), are sacrosanct – one does not make phone calls or any sort of noise (especially with motorcycles) at this time. **Quiet** is also mandated by law **between midnight and 8am** in residential areas, though rarely observed.

The well-publicized ordeal of twelve British plane-spotters who processed slowly through Greek jails and courts in 2001–2 on espionage charges should be ample incentive to **take no pictures** at all in and **around airports or military installations**. A "No pictures at all" sign includes farewell snaps on the runway; most civilian airports double as air-force bases.

Any sort of **disrespect** towards the Greek state or Orthodox Church in general, or Greek civil servants in particular, may be construed as actionable, so it's best to keep your comments on how things are working (or not) to yourself – this is a society where verbal injuries count.

In the non-verbal field, ripped or soiled clothes are considered nearly as insulting. **Grungy attire** will be interpreted in one of two possible ways: poverty is an uncomfortably close memory for many, and they may consider that you're making light of hard times; more to the point, fashion victim-hood is developed to near-Italian levels in Greece and if you clearly have so little self-respect as to appear slovenly and dishevelled in public, why should any Greek respect you?

Public drunkenness has always been held in contempt in Greece, where the inability to hold one's liquor is considered shameful. Inebriation will be considered an aggravating factor if you're busted for something else, not an excuse.

Drug offences are treated as major crimes, particularly since there's a mushrooming local addiction problem. The maximum penalty for "causing the use of drugs by someone under 18", for example, is life imprisonment and an astronomical fine. Foreigners caught in possession of even small amounts of marijuana get long jail sentences if there's evidence that they've been supplying the drug to others. Moreover, you could be inside on remand for well over a year awaiting a trial date, with not much chance of bail being granted.

If you get arrested for any offence, you have a right to contact your **consulate** (usually in Athens, though there's a British vice-consulate in Iráklion), which will arrange a lawyer for your defence.

Women travellers

Thousands of **women** travel independently in Crete without being **harassed** or feeling intimidated. With the sea-change in local mores since the 1980s – specifically, a vast increase in the "availability" of young Greek women to young local men, up to and including living together before marriage – much of the traditional Mediterranean-macho impetus for trying one's luck with foreign girls has faded. Any hassle you do get is from a nearly extinct species of professionally single Greek men, known as *kamákia* (harpoons), who haunt beach bars and dance clubs. There's more danger of harassment or assault by drunken fellow tourists in the wilder resorts (Mália, for example) than from ill-intentioned locals. Nonetheless, follow the obvious precautions: not to go out bar-crawling alone, walk home alone late at night, or accept late-night rides from strangers (indeed avoid **hitching** at any time of the day if solo). In more remote localities women may feel slightly uncomfortable travelling **alone**. The traditional villagers may not understand why you are unaccompanied, and might not welcome your presence in their exclusively male *kafenía* – often the only place where you can get a drink. Travelling with a man, you're more likely to be treated as a *xéni*, a word meaning both (female) stranger and guest.

Electricity

The **electricity** supply – erratic at times, especially during summer peak demand – is 220 volt AC. Plugs are the standard European variety of two round pins, and you should pick up an adapter before you leave home, as they can be difficult to find locally. North American appliances (unless they're dual voltage) will also require a transformer.

Entry requirements

UK and all other EU nationals need only a valid passport for entry to Greece, and are not stamped in on arrival or out upon departure (or in other words, you can stay as long as you like). US, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and most non-EU Europeans receive mandatory entry and exit stamps in their passports and can stay as tourists for ninety days (cumulative) in any six-month period. Such nationals who arrive via another EU state that is not party to the Schengen Agreement may not be stamped in routinely at minor Greek ports, so it's best to ensure this is done to avoid problems on exit. Your passport must be valid for three months after your arrival date.

If you are planning to **travel overland** to Greece you should check current visa requirements for Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria at their closest consulates.

Visitors from non-EU countries, unless of Greek descent, are very rarely granted

extensions to tourist visas. If you overstay you're liable to be deported (at vast expense) or will be hit with a large fine upon departure when you attempt to leave.

Greek embassies abroad

Australia 9 Turrana St, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600 ⓣ02/6273 3011.
Canada 80 Maclaren St, Ottawa, ON K2P 0K6 ⓣ613/238-6271.
Ireland 1 Upper Pembroke St, Dublin 2 ⓣ01/676 7254.
New Zealand 5–7 Willeston St, Wellington ⓣ04/473 7775.
UK 1A Holland Park, London W11 3TP ⓣ020/7221 6467, ⓦwww.greekembassy.org.uk.
USA 2221 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008 ⓣ202/939-5800, ⓦwww.greekembassy.org.

Gay and lesbian travellers

There are no specifically gay resorts on Crete, and few gay holidays offered by tour operators, though a Web search will turn up a number of gay-friendly accommodation options.

Homosexuality is legal in Greece over the age of 17, and (male) bisexual behaviour common but rarely admitted; the law code itself, however, still contains pejorative references to passive partners. Greek men are terrible flirts, but cruising them is a semiotic minefield and definitely at your own risk – references in (often obsolete) gay guides to "known" male cruising grounds should be treated sceptically. Out gay Greeks are rare, and out local lesbians rarer still; foreign same-sex couples will generally be regarded with some bemusement but accorded the standard courtesy as foreigners – as long as they refrain from indulging in displays of affection in public, which remains taboo in rural areas.

Health

British and other EU nationals are officially entitled to free medical care in Greece upon presentation of a European Health Insurance Card (see below). The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have no formal healthcare agreements with Greece (other than allowing for free emergency trauma treatment), so insurance is highly recommended.

There are no required **inoculations** for Greece, though it's wise to ensure that you are up to date on tetanus and polio. The **drinking water** is safe pretty much everywhere, and especially refreshing when it pours straight from a mountain spring. Despite this, almost everyone drinks the bottled stuff instead, available in inexpensive plastic bottles everywhere. Crete has few of the water shortages that bedevil smaller islands – it's only in isolated villages or resorts that have grown faster than the plumbing can cope with where you're likely to have a problem.

The European Health Insurance Card

If you have an EHIC card you are entitled to free consultation and treatment from doctors and dentists – there may be small charges for secondary treatments (such as x-rays), however. At hospitals you should simply have to show your EHIC card; for free treatment from a regular doctor or dentist, you should call the IKA (the Social Insurance Institute, which administers the scheme) on its national appointments hotline, ⓣ184. For prescriptions from chemists in the state scheme you pay a small fixed charge plus 25 percent of the cost of the medicine; if you are charged in full, get a receipt and keep the original prescription to claim it back. You can also claim back for private treatment; take the original receipts and your EHIC card to the IKA within one month, and they will reimburse you up to the limit allowed for similar treatment by the IKA. There are IKA offices in Iráklion and Haniá, or if you are unable to get there, you can theoretically apply for a refund on your return home.
Futher details:
ⓦwww.dh.gov.uk/travellers
ⓦwww.ehic.org.uk
ⓦwww.ehic.ie

Doctors and hospitals

For serious medical attention you'll find English-speaking doctors (mainly private) in all the bigger towns and resorts: if your hotel can't help, the tourist police or your consulate should be able to come up with some names if you have any difficulty. There are also hospitals in all the big cities. For an **ambulance**, phone ☎166.

Pharmacies, drugs and contraception

For **minor complaints** it's enough to go to the local **farmakío**. Greek pharmacists are highly trained and dispense a number of medicines which elsewhere could only be prescribed by a doctor. In the larger towns and resorts there'll usually be one who speaks good English. Pharmacies are usually closed evenings and Saturday mornings, but all should have a monthly schedule (in both English and Greek) on their door showing the night and weekend duty pharmacists in town.

Greeks are famously hypochondriac, so pharmacies are veritable Aladdin's caves of **arcane drugs and sundry formulas** – just about everything available in North America and northern Europe is here, and then some. **Homeopathic** and **herbal** remedies are widely available, too, alongside more conventional products.

If you regularly use any form of **prescription drug**, you should bring along a copy of the prescription, together with the generic name of the drug; this will help you replace it, and avoids problems with customs officials. In this regard, you should be aware that **codeine is banned** in Greece. If you import any you might find yourself in serious trouble, so check labels carefully; it's a major ingredient of Panadeine, Veganin, Solpadeine, Codis and Nurofen Plus, to name just a few common compounds.

Contraceptive pills are more readily available every year, but don't count on getting them – or spermicidal jelly/foam – except at the larger pharmacies in larger towns and resorts. **Condoms** (*profylaktiká* or less formally *plastiká* or *kapótes*) are inexpensive and available at almost any supermarket, pharmacy or kiosk, as are **tampons** and sanitary towels.

Specific health problems

The main health problems experienced by visitors – including many blamed on the food – have to do with **overexposure to the sun**. To avoid these, don't spend too long in the sun, cover up, wear a hat, and drink plenty of fluids to avoid any danger of **sunstroke**; remember that even hazy sun can burn. To avoid hazards by the sea, goggles or a dive mask for swimming and footwear for walking over wet or rough rocks are useful. Hayfever sufferers should be prepared for a pollen season earlier than in northern Europe, peaking in April and May.

Hazards of the sea

You may have the bad luck to meet an armada of jellyfish (*tsoúkhtres*), especially in late summer; they come in various colours and sizes ranging from purple "pizzas" to invisible, minute creatures. Various over-the-counter remedies are sold in resort pharmacies to combat the sting, and baking soda or diluted ammonia also help to lessen the effects. The welts and burning usually subside of their own accord within a few hours; there are no deadly species in the waters around Crete. Less vicious but far more common are spiny sea urchins, which infest rocky shorelines year-round. If you're unlucky enough to step on, or graze against one, an effective way to remove the spines is with a needle (you can crudely sterilize it with heat from a cigarette lighter) and olive oil. If you don't remove the spines, they'll fester. You can take your revenge by eating the roe of the reddish-purple urchins, served as a delicacy (*achinósalata*) in many seafood restaurants.

Mosquitoes and sandflies

While Cretan mosquitoes (*kounóupia*) don't carry anything worse than a vicious bite, they can be infuriating. At any minimarket you can buy inexpensive electrical devices (common trade names include Vape-Nat or Bay-Vap) which vaporize an odourless insecticide tablet or liquid. They're far cheaper here than bought at home. Traditional pyrethrum incense coils (*spíres* or *fidhákia* in Greek) are also widely and cheaply available, but no longer recommended for indoor use. Whilst eating or drinking outdoors, a rub-on stick such as Autan is equally effective. On beaches, sandflies are another irritant, and their bites are potentially dangerous, carrying visceral leishmaniasis, a rare parasitic infection characterized by chronic fever, listlessness and weight loss.

Scorpions, snakes and insects

Adders (*ohiés*) and scorpions (*scorpii*) are found throughout the island. Both creatures are shy, but take care when climbing over dry stone walls where snakes like to sun themselves, and – particularly when camping – don't put hands or feet in places, like shoes, where you haven't looked first.

Finally, in addition to munching its way through a fair amount of Greece's surviving pine forests, the pine processionary caterpillar – which takes its name from the long, nose-to-tail convoys which individuals form at certain points in their lifecycle – sports highly irritating hairs, with a poison worse than a scorpion's. If you touch one, or even a tree-trunk they've been on recently, you'll know all about it for a week, and the welts may require antihistamine to heal.

Insurance

Even though EU health care privileges apply in Greece (see p.61 for details), you'd do well to take out an insurance policy before travelling to cover against theft, loss, illness or injury. Before paying for a whole new policy, however, it's worth checking whether you are already covered: some all-risks home insurance policies may cover your possessions when overseas, and many private medical schemes offer coverage extensions for abroad.

In Canada, provincial health plans usually provide partial cover for medical mishaps overseas, while holders of official student/teacher/youth cards in Canada and the US are entitled to meagre accident coverage and hospital inpatient benefits. Students will often find that their student health coverage extends during the vacations and for one term beyond the date of last enrolment. Many credit-card issuers also offer some sort of insurance if you pay for the holiday with their card; however, it's vital to check just what these policies cover.

After exhausting the possibilities above, you might want to contact a specialist travel insurance company, or consider the travel insurance deal from Rough Guides (see box below). A typical travel insurance policy provides cover for the loss of baggage, tickets and – up to a certain limit – cash, cards or cheques, as well as cancellation or curtailment of your journey. Most of them exclude so-called dangerous sports unless an extra premium is paid: in Crete this could include horse-riding, windsurfing, trekking, mountaineering and motorbiking. Many policies can be chopped and changed to exclude coverage you don't need. If you do take medical coverage, check whether benefits will be paid as treatment proceeds or only after return home, whether there is a 24-hour medical emergency number, and how much the deductible excess is (sometimes negotiable). When securing baggage cover, make sure that the per-article limit – typically less than £500 in the UK – will cover your most valuable possession. Travel agents and tour operators in the UK can no longer insist

Rough Guide travel insurance

Rough Guides has teamed up with Columbus Direct to offer **travel insurance** that can be tailored to suit your needs. Products include a low-cost **backpacker** option for long stays; a **short break** option for city getaways; a typical **holiday package** option; and others. There are also annual **multi-trip** policies for those who travel regularly. Different sports and activities (trekking, skiing, etc) can usually be covered if required.

See our website (Ⓦ www.roughguidesinsurance.com) for eligibility and purchasing options. Alternatively, UK residents should call ⓣ 0870/033 9988; Australians should call ⓣ 1300/669 999 and New Zealanders should call ⓣ 0800/55 9911. All other nationalities should call ⓣ +44 870/890 2843.

that you buy theirs.

If you need to make a medical claim, you should keep receipts for medicines and treatment, and in the event you have anything stolen or lost, you must obtain an official statement from the police or the airline which lost your bags. With a rise in the numbers of fraudulent claims, most insurers won't even consider one unless you have a police report. Bear in mind also that there's usually a time limit for submitting claims after the end of your journey.

Internet

Internet cafés are plentiful in the major towns and resorts, though not surprisingly rarer in rural locations; they're listed throughout the Guide. Rates are around €3.50 an hour, or less. On the whole, connections are fast and efficient – noise and smoke are more likely to be a problem, especially in places that cater (as many do) primarily to young computer gamers. Only the fanciest business **hotels** in the cities and the most modern of the luxury resorts will have wireless (or any other) access in the rooms, though many smaller rooms places or apartment complexes may have a terminal that guests can use.

Laundry

Self-service **launderettes** are relatively rare in Crete, though you'll find something in all the bigger resorts and towns – often places where they'll do a full-service wash, returning your clothes dried and neatly folded (about €9 for a large load); such establishments appear in the relevant sections of the Guide. Bigger hotels will also have organized laundry services, for a price, while if you ask at smaller places they may be prepared to wash a load for you. In any event, some kind of concentrated travel wash is a handy investment, allowing you to wash your clothes in the shower or sink and dry them on the balcony; apartments and villas usually supply plastic wash-tubs or buckets and washing lines and pegs. More old-fashioned places may well have an outdoor laundry area which you can use.

Living in Crete

Many habitual visitors fall in love with Crete and end up as part- or full-time residents, more likely buying property than renting it, and most probably retired or self-employed rather than working at relatively low Greek wages. EU citizens are entitled to stay indefinitely, and to work in Crete, but this is a highly bureaucratic society where getting a job (at least legally) is fraught with paperwork, as are the everyday needs of getting a phone, power and the like. It's beyond the scope of this book to go into detail, but there's plenty of assistance available locally, above all from the existing ex-pat community who've done it all before. The website Ⓦwww.livingincrete.net is also an excellent resource.

Though you don't strictly need one, a **residence permit** is an excellent first step, allowing you to vote locally and making formalities such as opening a bank account far easier. Residence/work permits for **non-EU nationals** can only be obtained on application to a Greek embassy or consulate outside of Greece; you have a much better chance of securing one if you are married to a Greek, are of Greek background by birth (an *omoyenís*), or have permanent-resident status in another EU state, but even then expect wrangles and delays. Many non-EU nationals working illegally in Greece resort to the old ploy of heading off to Bulgaria or Turkey for a few days every three months and re-entering at a different border post for a new passport stamp; this usually works, but if not, penalties as described on p.61 potentially apply.

Work

Work opportunities in Crete are severely limited, and EU membership notwithstanding, **short-term unskilled work** is often badly paid and undocumented, with employers skimping on the requirement to pay IKA (social insurance contributions) for their employees, meaning that you are working illegally. The old standby of work on the harvests is now dominated by immigrants from Albania and eastern Europe, and appallingly paid even if you can find work.

There's a far better chance of work in **tourism**, or teaching English. Many bars, tavernas and hotels have seasonal jobs, for which you should turn up early in the season and ask around. Your chances will be better if you can speak more than one language (ideally including Greek!), and if you are female. Men, unless they are trained chefs, find it harder to find any work, even washing up.

If you're waiting or serving, most of your wages will probably have to come from tips, but you may get a deal that includes free food and lodging; evening-only hours can be a good shift, leaving you a lot of free time. The main drawback may be the machismo and/or chauvinist attitudes of your employer, plus the fact that in the resorts young women are frequently hired to lure men in and persuade them to drink. Start looking around April or May and you'll get better rates at this time if you're taken on for a season.

On a similar, unofficial level you might be able to work in a tourist shop, or (if you've the expertise) helping out at a watersports centre. Perhaps the best type of tourism-related work, however, is that of courier/greeter/group coordinator for a package holiday company. Most of these jobs are filled well in advance, but people may leave or fall ill – get yourself known to the reps, locally or on their airport runs, and you may get lucky.

Teaching English is largely a winter job, in the big towns where the language schools are. Technically you need to be a university graduate with a TEFL qualification, but anyone with a good grasp of English grammar stands a chance.

Mail

The Greek postal system is reasonably efficient, especially for outgoing mail. Local **post offices** are generally open from 7.30am to 2pm, Monday to Friday; in big towns and important tourist centres, many open again in the evening and on Saturday morning. As anywhere, post offices tend to have long queues, so if all you want is a stamp (*grammatósimo*) you're better off buying it when you buy your postcards, or from almost any *períptero* (kiosk) and most minimarkets. Postage for postcards and letters up to 20g is the same for all international destinations, currently €0.65. Airmail letters take three to six days to reach the rest of Europe, five to twelve days to North America, and a bit longer for Australia and New Zealand. For a modest fee (about €3) you can use the express service (*katepígonda*), which cuts letter delivery time to two days for the UK and three days for the Americas.

Ordinary **post boxes** are bright yellow, express boxes dark red, but it's best to use those by the door of a post office if possible, since days may pass between collections at others. If you are confronted by two slots, use the one marked "*Exoterikó*" for international mail, "*Esoterikó*" for letters within Greece.

Maps

Maps of Crete are easily available all over the island, but you'll almost certainly find a better one at home. Having said that, even the best maps seem to have a number of significant errors, whether because they can't keep up with the rapidly improving road system or because of official Greek paranoia over detailed maps falling into the wrong hands. For drivers this is rarely more than a minor irritation, but hikers should take care not to rely solely on a single map and to confirm directions locally wherever possible.

The best maps for driving and general use are the Harms-Verlag (Ⓦwww.harms-ic-verlag.de) and Rough Guide editions (1:140,000; Ⓦwww.roughguides.com); some of the better free car-hire maps are also surprisingly useful – they may be small-scale and covered in adverts, but they tend to be updated regularly, which means that they often show the main roads more accurately than many more professional-looking rivals. You can download a free, fairly basic but reasonably up-to-date map (1:365,000), from the Greek Tourist Office at Ⓦwww.gnto.gr/EmentorImages/File/roadmaps/kriti.zip.

If you want more detail, for **hiking** for example, the best available general maps are the Harms-Verlag touring maps, two maps covering the east and west of the island separately, or the trekking and road maps (one for each province), produced by Iráklion publisher Petrákis. Both are 1:100,000 and include many footpaths and topographical features missing from other publications. You may have trouble finding the latter outside Crete. For specific areas, Greek cartographer Anavasi (Ⓦwww.anavasi.gr) published excellent 1:25,000 maps of three areas of the White Mountains, plus one of Mt Psilorítis, in 2006: more may follow, along with 1:100,000 regional touring maps.

Finally, some parts of the island are covered by maps and guidelets produced by local enthusiasts or foreign ramblers – these are mentioned in the relevant sections of the Guide, as well as the "Books" section of Contexts.

Map outlets in the UK and Ireland

Stanfords 12–14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP ⓣ020/7836 1321, ⓦwww.stanfords.co.uk. Also at 39 Spring Gardens, Manchester ⓣ0161/831 0250, and 29 Corn St, Bristol ⓣ0117/929 9966.
Blackwell's Map Centre 50 Broad St, Oxford OX1 3BQ ⓣ01865/793 550, ⓦwww.maps.blackwell.co.uk. Branches in Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle and Sheffield.
Easons Bookshop 40–42 Lower O'Connell St, Dublin 1 ⓣ01/858 3881, ⓦwww.eason.ie.
The Map Shop 30a Belvoir St, Leicester LE1 6QH ⓣ0116/247 1400, ⓦwww.mapshopleicester.co.uk.
National Map Centre 22–24 Caxton St, London SW1H 0QU ⓣ020/7222 2466, ⓦwww.mapsnmc.co.uk.
National Map Centre Ireland 34 Aungier St, Dublin ⓣ01/476 0471, ⓦwww.mapcentre.ie.
The Travel Bookshop 13–15 Blenheim Crescent, London W11 2EE ⓣ020/7229 5260, ⓦwww.thetravelbookshop.co.uk.
Traveller 55 Grey St, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 6EF ⓣ0191/261 5622, ⓦwww.newtraveller.com.

In the US and Canada

Distant Lands 56 S Raymond Ave, Pasadena, CA 91105 ⓣ1-800/310-3220, ⓦwww.distantlands.com.
Globe Corner Bookstore 28 Church St, Cambridge, MA 02138 ⓣ1-800/358-6013, ⓦwww.globecorner.com.
Longitude Books 115 W 30th St #1206, New York, NY 10001 ⓣ1-800/342-2164, ⓦwww.longitudebooks.com.
Map Town 400 5 Ave SW #100, Calgary, AB T2P 0L6 ⓣ1-877/921-6277 or ⓣ403/266-2241, ⓦwww.maptown.com.
Travel Bug Bookstore 3065 W Broadway, Vancouver, BC V6K 2G9 ⓣ604/737-1122, ⓦwww.travelbugbooks.ca.
World of Maps 1235 Wellington St, Ottawa, ON K1Y 3A3 ⓣ1-800/214-8524 or ⓣ613/724-6776, ⓦwww.worldofmaps.com.

In Australia and New Zealand

Mapland (Australia) 372 Little Bourke St, Melbourne ⓣ03/9670 4383, ⓦwww.mapland.com.au.
Map Shop (Australia) 6–10 Peel St, Adelaide ⓣ08/8231 2033, ⓦwww.mapshop.net.au.
Map World (Australia) 371 Pitt St, Sydney ⓣ02/9261 3601, ⓦwww.mapworld.net.au. Also in Perth, Canberra and Crows Nest, NSW.
Map World (New Zealand) 173 Gloucester St, Christchurch ⓣ0800/627 967, ⓦwww.mapworld.co.nz.

Money

Currency in Crete is the euro (€). Euro coins are issued in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents and 1 and 2 euro; euro **notes** come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euro. The latter two high-value notes are rarely seen, and you may have trouble using them. The exchange rate for the euro at the time of writing was around €1.52 to the pound sterling (or £0.66 for one euro) and €0.77 to the US dollar ($0.30 for one euro). Up-to-date exchange rates can be found on many websites, including ⓦwww.xe.com.

Banks and exchange

The airports at Haniá and Iráklion should always have an exchange desk operating for passengers on incoming international flights – but at peak periods there's often a queue and it's well worth taking some local currency to tide you over the first few hours.

Banks on Crete are normally open Mon–Thurs 8.30am–2.30pm, Fri 8.30am–2pm. Certain branches in the tourist centres open extra hours in the evenings and Saturday mornings to change money, while outside these hours larger hotels, travel agencies and even tourist information offices can often change money, albeit with hefty commissions. When using a bank, always take your passport with you as proof of identity and be prepared for at least one long queue – often you have to line up once to have the transaction approved and again to pick up the cash. Rates and commissions vary considerably, even between branches of the same bank, so ask first. For obvious reasons, it is far easier to change money in the big resorts and towns than in rural areas.

Travellers' cheques, credit cards and ATMs

Travellers' cheques are the safest way to carry money, but far from the most convenient. They're accepted at banks and at larger hotels and travel agencies in the resorts, but don't expect to be able to use them in shops or smaller rooms places. Similarly, major credit cards are widely accepted, but only by the more expensive stores, hotels and restaurants: they're useful for renting cars, for example, but no good in the cheaper tavernas or rooms places. If you run short of money, you can also get a cash advance on a credit card from a bank; however, this is an expensive and often time-consuming way to get cash, and you'll be paying interest from the moment you do it. Far better to use ATMs (cash dispensers), which can be found in all the resorts and towns of any size. Again, you shouldn't expect to find them in rural areas or the smaller resorts (especially on the south coast). They're easy to use, with your normal PIN, and have instructions in English; you won't normally know what exchange rate you're getting or how much you're being charged, but in most cases rates and commission are no higher than the alternatives. Using a credit card in an ATM is generally more expensive, and again you'll be charged interest from the moment you do so: there are, however, a few ATMs in Crete that only accept Visa.

Wiring money

In an emergency you can arrange to have substantial amounts of **money wired** from your home bank to a bank in Greece. Receiving funds by SWIFT transfer takes anywhere from two to ten working days. From the UK, a bank charge of 0.03 percent, with a minimum of £17, maximum £35, is typically levied for two-day service; some charge a £20 flat fee irrespective of the amount. If you choose this method, your home bank will need the IBAN (international bank account number) for the account to which funds are being sent or, failing that, the bank name and branch code. It's unwise to transfer more than the equivalent of €10,000; above that limit, as part of measures to combat money-laundering, the receiving Greek bank will begin asking awkward questions and imposing punitive commissions.

Having money wired from home using one of the **companies** listed below is less convenient and even more expensive than using a bank; local affiliate offices are thin on the ground in Crete, although post offices can be the designated receiving points for Western Union. However, the funds should be available for collection at the local representative office within hours – sometimes minutes – of being sent.

Money-wiring companies

Travelers Express MoneyGram US ⓣ1-800/444-3010, Canada ⓣ1-800 933-3278, UK, Republic of Ireland and New Zealand ⓣ00800 6663 9472, Australia ⓣ001 1800 230 100, ⓦwww.moneygram.com.

Western Union US and Canada ⓣ1-800/CALL-CASH, Australia ⓣ1800 501 500, New Zealand ⓣ0800 005 253, UK ⓣ0800 833 833, Republic of Ireland ⓣ66/947 5603, ⓦwww.westernunion.com (those in the US or Canada can send money online).

Movies

Cretan cinemas show the regular major release movies, which in the case of English-language titles will almost always be in English with Greek subtitles. In summer open-air screens operate in all the major towns and some of the resorts, and these are absolutely wonderful. You may not hear much thanks to crackly speakers and locals chatting away throughout, but watching a movie under the stars on a warm night is simply a great experience.

Opening hours and public holidays

It's virtually impossible to generalize about Cretan opening hours, except to say that they change constantly. The traditional timetable starts early – stores open at 7 or 8am – and runs through until lunchtime, when there is a long break for the hottest part of the day; things may then reopen in the mid- to late afternoon. In tourist areas, though, stores and offices may stay open right through the day – certainly the most important archeological sites and museums do so. Almost everything will be closed on the public holidays listed overleaf.

Public holidays

January 1
January 6
March 25
First Monday of Lent (48 days before Easter; see below)
Good Friday (variable April/May; see below)
Easter Sunday (variable April/May; see below)
May 1
Pentecost or Whit Monday (50 days after Easter; see below)
August 15
October 28
December 25 and 26

Variable religious feasts

Lenten Monday
2008 March 10
2009 March 2
2010 February 15
Easter Sunday
2008 April 27
2009 April 19
2010 April 4
Whit Monday
2008 June 16
2009 June 8
2010 May 24

Businesses and shops

Most government agencies are open to the public on weekdays from 8am to 2pm. In general, however, you'd be optimistic to show up after 1pm expecting to be served the same day. Private businesses, or anyone providing a service, especially to tourists, frequently operate a straight 9am–5/6pm schedule.

Shopping hours during the hottest months are theoretically Monday, Wednesday and Saturday from approximately 9am to 2.30pm, and Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8.30am to 2pm and 6 to 9pm. During the cooler months the morning schedule shifts slightly forward, the evening session a half or even a full hour back. There are so many exceptions to the rule though, by virtue of holidays and professional idiosyncrasy, that you can't count on getting anything done, except from Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 1pm or so. Closed pharmacies should have a sign on their door referring you to the nearest open one.

Museums and archeological sites

Museums tend to close on Mondays, except for certain major ones such as the archeological museum in Iráklion, where the Monday hours will usually be curtailed. Opening hours vary between archeological sites; as far as possible, individual times are quoted in the Guide, but these change with exasperating frequency and, at smaller sites, can be subject to the whim of a local keeper. Unless specified, the times quoted are summer hours, in effect from around late May to the end of September. Reckon on similar days but later opening and earlier closing in winter. Smaller archeological sites generally close for a long lunch and siesta (even where they're not meant to), as do monasteries. Most monasteries are fairly strict on dress, too, especially for women: they don't like shorts and often expect women to cover their arms and wear skirts. They are generally open from about 9am to 1pm and 5 to 7pm. A list of current opening hours is available from tourist offices.

Phones

There's excellent **mobile phone** coverage throughout Crete, and you should be able to pick up a signal just about anywhere. To use your own phone you'll need to call your provider to ensure that you have international roaming switched on (US users should also check that their phone will work in Europe), and you should find out the cost of calls at the same time. International charges are coming down, but they're still very high, and remember that you'll be charged for incoming as well as outgoing calls. If you plan to use a phone extensively you might well be better off buying a Greek **pay-as-you-go** SIM card (or even an entire phone, starting from around €15); you may have to have your phone unlocked to use this, but most

Useful phone codes and numbers

Phoning home

Dial the country code below, then the area code (minus its initial zero, except in Canada and the US), and then the number.

Australia	Ⓣ0061
New Zealand	Ⓣ0064
Republic of Ireland	Ⓣ00353
South Africa	Ⓣ0027
UK	Ⓣ0044
USA and Canada	Ⓣ001

Useful Greek phone numbers

Ambulance	Ⓣ166
ELPA breakdown	Ⓣ104
Fire service	Ⓣ199
Forest fire reporting	Ⓣ191
Operator (domestic)	Ⓣ132
Operator (international)	Ⓣ139
Police/emergency	Ⓣ100
Tourist police	Ⓣ171

Greek mobile shops can do this for a small fee. Text messaging is a far cheaper alternative if you choose not to get a Greek SIM, but even texts cost far more than at home and won't be included in your normal allowance.

Calling on regular phones is pretty straightforward, and all the resorts and towns of any size will have **call boxes**, invariably sited at the noisiest street corner. These work only with phone cards (*tilekártes*), widely available from kiosks and newsagents in various denominations starting at €4. They offer fairly good value even for international calls, especially within Europe. Many hotel lobbies and cafés also have counter coin-op phones; unlike the street phone boxes, they can receive incoming calls and most have instructions in English. A **calling card** may make international calls cheaper; either one provided by your own operator at home, accessed by a freephone number and charged directly to your domestic account (these are convenient, but rates vary), or a prepaid card which you can buy from many local kiosks and newsagents (compare rates, as different cards offer better value for different countries).

Avoid making calls from your hotel room, as a minimum one-hundred-percent surcharge will be slapped on (some even charge for free calls).

Senior travellers

Travellers over sixty are accorded every respect in Crete, which still has a deeply ingrained tradition of respect for one's elders. You're also entitled to discounts or free entry at state-run sites and museums and many private attractions, as well as cut-price rates on some buses, ferries and domestic flights. For any of these, you'll need to have proof of age to hand – the easiest way to do this is by carrying your passport with you.

Sport

Perhaps not surprisingly, **watersports** are tremendously popular in Crete, and in most of the bigger resorts you can go waterskiing or parasailing, and sometimes hire boats or windsurfers. **Windsurfing** is particularly good in the far east and the far west, with a major centre at Kourémenos Beach (p.207) and good opportunities, too, in Paleohóra (p.386). **Scuba-diving** is also growing in popularity, largely due to the relaxation of government controls. There are centres where you can learn to dive in all the major north coast resorts, but the best diving is probably off the south coast – especially around Plakiás and Paleohóra, where there are excellent dive centres – and in the far east, where there are fewer facilities. There isn't much life left in the Mediterranean, but these waters have more than most, and they're also exceptionally clear, while the rocky coast offers plenty of caves and hidden nooks to explore.

Away from the coast, it's the mountains that are the great lure, with plenty of **hiking** options, from gentle strolls to long-distance mountain paths, and above all the great **gorge** walks, predominantly in the south.

There's also plenty of opportunity for more serious **climbing** in both the White Mountains of the west and the Psiloritis range in central Crete. In most of the resorts you can hire **mountain bikes**, and many of the rental places lead organized rides, which again vary from easy explorations of the countryside to serious rides up proper mountains. Believe it or not, it is even possible to **ski** in Crete in winter: there's a tiny ski lift on the Nídha Plain above Anóyia, while the *Kalleryi Lodge* in the White Mountains may also open for ski parties. Don't come specially. For all of the above, you'll find more information in the websites listed on p.40.

As for spectator sports, **soccer and basketball** are Crete's major obsessions. OFI, from Iráklion, is a premier-division football team and one of Greece's leading sides after the big three from Athens. In season (Sept–June) matches against many of Greece's major teams – normally played on Sundays – are easy enough to catch at their ground, Demotikou, in the west of the city. Warm-up games for the new season in late August often feature visits by overseas sides.

Student and youth travellers

Students from the EU and anyone under 18 are entitled to **free entry** at state-run museums and archeological sites, and there are substantial reductions for non-EU students too. You'll need proof of your status, and various official and quasi-official youth/student ID cards are available which may well pay for themselves in savings. Full-time students are eligible for the International Student ID Card (ISIC; Ⓦwww.isic.org), which entitles the bearer to special air and ferry fares and discounts at numerous shops and attractions. For Americans there's also a health benefit, providing token medical coverage and a per-day stipend for hospital stays up to two months. The card costs $22 in the US, Can$16 for Canadians, A$18 for Australians, NZ$22 for New Zealanders, £7 in the UK, and €13 in the Republic of Ireland.

You only have to be 26 or younger to qualify for the International Youth Travel Card, which costs the same and carries the same benefits – it's not strictly student ID, but will probably work. Teachers qualify for the International Teacher Identity Card (ITIC), again at the same price and with similar benefits: teachers also get free entry to state-run museums and sites (as do journalists and over-60s).

Several other travel organizations and accommodation groups also sell their own cards, good for various discounts.

Time

Greek summer time begins at 2am on the last Sunday in March, when the clocks go forward one hour, and ends at 2am on the last Sunday in October when clocks fall back one hour. Be alert to this, as the change is not well publicized, leading scores of visitors to miss planes and ferries every year. Greek time is always two hours ahead of Britain. For North America, the standard time difference is seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, ten hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, with an extra hour plus or minus for those weeks in April and October when one place is on daylight saving and the other isn't.

Tipping

Restaurant bills include service, so large-scale **tipping** is not expected – leaving the small change or rounding up the bill is normal. If you are offered hospitality by a local they are likely to insist on paying – and offering cash can be seen as offensive. The best solution is to offer to reciprocate, making clear that it's on you next time.

Toilets

In **toilets** throughout Greece (and to the horror of most first-time visitors) you're expected to toss paper in a wastebasket, not in the bowl: learn this habit, or you'll block the pipes. There's almost always a sign to remind you, but even if not you should do so, except in the most modern and upmarket hotels. Public toilets, generally foul, are rare except in the towns, usually in parks or squares, often subterranean. Otherwise try a bus station or pay for a coffee somewhere. It's worth carrying toilet paper with you – though it's provided by the attendants at public facilities, there may be none in tavernas or cafés.

Travellers with disabilities

It is all too easy to wax lyrical over the attractions of Crete – the stepped, narrow alleys, the ease of travel by bus and ferry, the thrill of clambering around the great archeological sites. Travellers who use a wheelchair or have limited mobility or vision may not be so impressed. Uneven pavements, steep streets, and lack of facilities in ancient towns will always be an issue. None of the major archeological sites or museums are at all wheelchair friendly and nor, on the whole, are the towns and resorts.

Having said that, new hotels and apartments are increasingly taking people with disabilities into account in their design, and it's possible to enjoy an inexpensive and trauma-free holiday in Crete with a little forward planning. A quick Web search will find a number of organizations that can help, including numerous small travel agencies that specialize in travel for the disabled. One resort hotel, the *Eria* (Ⓦ www.eria-resort.gr Ⓣ +30 28210 62790), in Maleme near Haniá, has been designed specifically for disabled visitors and their carers, with facilities including hire of most equipment you might need (from oxygen to hoists), physiotherapy, accessible airport transfers and so on. Unfortunately, it's not cheap.

Many other hotels and apartments are accessible, and even mainstream operators and the large package companies now provide information on access, although such advice rarely extends to what happens when you venture beyond the front door.

A medical certificate of your fitness to travel, provided by your doctor, is extremely useful; some airlines or insurance companies may insist on it. You should also carry extra supplies of any required drugs and a prescription including the generic name in case of emergency. It's probably best to assume that any special equipment, drugs or clothing you may require is unavailable in Crete and will need to be brought with you.

Useful items

It's worth bringing an alarm clock for early buses and ferries, as well as a torch for camping out, coping with power cuts, visiting caves and churches or finding your way to a midnight swim. A pair of binoculars will enhance enjoyment of the plentiful birdlife, and a pocket knife (preferably with lots of Swiss-Army style accessories) comes in handy for everything from cutting up fruit or cheese to extracting sea urchin spines.

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Iráklion

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CHAPTER 1

Highlights

- ✱ **Iráklion** The bustling capital city of Crete boasts good restaurants and cafés, a vibrant market and an impressive harbour fortress. **See p.80**
- ✱ **Archeological Museum, Iráklion** The world's most important museum of Minoan civilization, with a fabulous array of jewellery, vases, statuary and frescoes. **See p.90**
- ✱ **Knossós** Crete's major tourist attraction, the world-famous palace of Knossós remains the most impressive of the Minoan sites. **See p.102**
- ✱ **Górtys** Capital of Crete in Roman times, this site has plenty of ruins to explore, including the imposing remains of Áyios Títos, the island's first Christian church. **See p.138**
- ✱ **Festós and Mália palaces** These two outstanding ancient sites in picturesque locations are superb examples of Minoan architecture. **See p.142 & p.127**
- ✱ **Museum of Cretan Ethnology, Vori** An outstanding folk museum in a mountainous, rural area of great beauty. **See p.147**
- ✱ **Léndas** In striking contrast to the brash north coast resorts, Léndas could hardly be more laid-back: a very small seaside village with some excellent rooms and restaurants, where there's almost nothing to do but chill on the beach. **See p.154**

△ Knossós, Minoan palace

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Iráklion

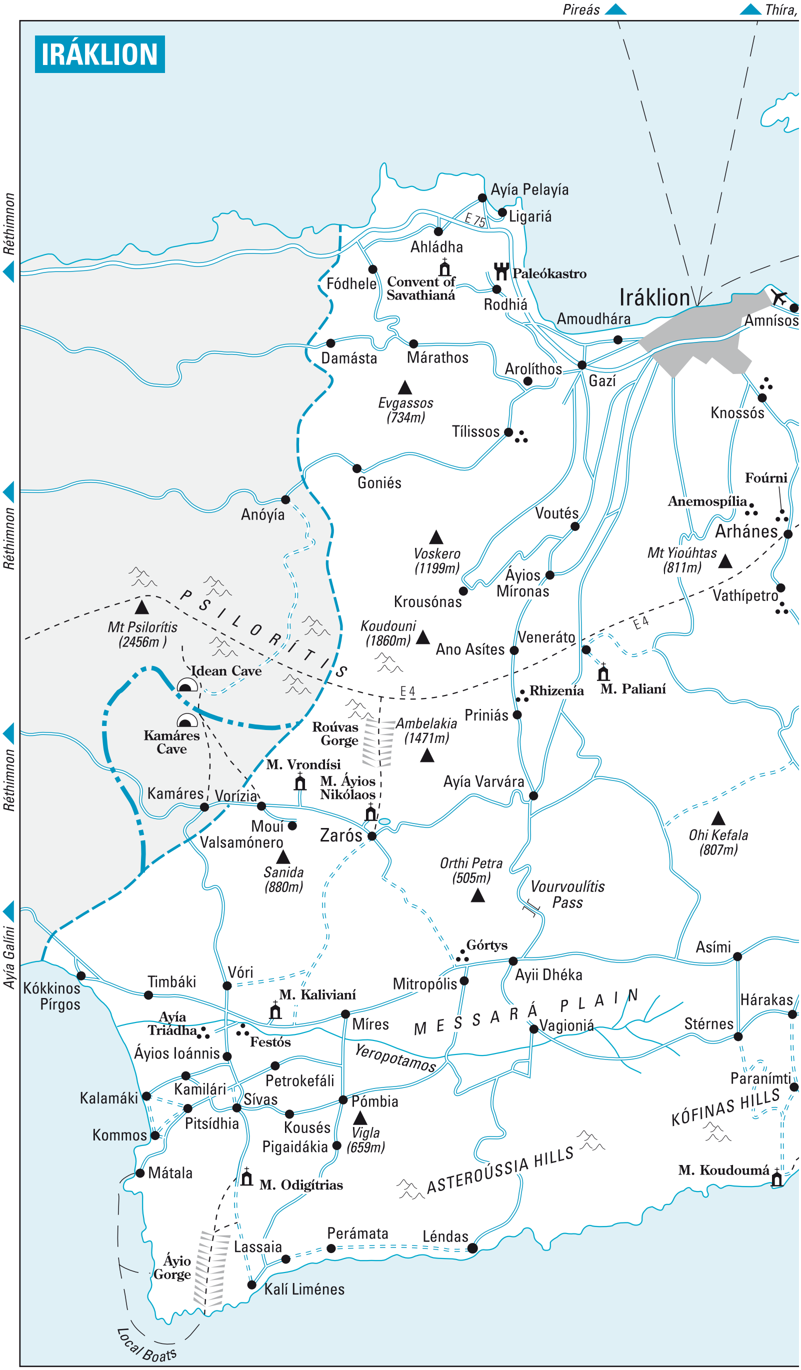
The province of **Iráklion** sees more tourists than any other in Crete. They come for two simple reasons: the string of big resorts that lies to the east of the city, only an hour or so from the airport, and the great Minoan sites, almost all of which are concentrated in the centre of the island. **Knossós**, **Mália** and **Festós** are in easy reach of almost anywhere in the province, and there are excellent beaches all along the north coast. The price you pay is crowds: **Iráklion** is a big, boisterous city with a population of around 150,000, the development to the east is continuous and huge, and, in summer, the great sites are constantly packed with people.

There seems little here of the old Crete, ramshackle and rural, and yet, by taking the less obvious turn, it is still possible to escape. West and south of Iráklion, the beaches are smaller and the coastline is less amenable to hotel builders. The south coast in particular is far less peopled: beaches are accessible only in a handful of places (of which only **Mátala** is at all exploited), whilst the interior remains traditional farming country, the Crete of shepherds and flocks, simple hamlets and ancient churches.

Iráklion and the north coast

Iráklion can at first sight seem an unattractive traffic-clogged metropolis, particularly if you arrive expecting a quaint little island town. You find yourself instead in the fifth largest city in Greece: strident and modern, a maelstrom of crowded thoroughfares, building work and dust. Penetrate behind this facade, however, and you can discover a vibrant working city with a myriad of attractive features which do much to temper initial impressions. Stay long enough and you may even begin to like the place – after all, there is plenty to see and do here. But if you've come to escape the urban grind you're perhaps better off taking the city for what it has: the major Minoan palace of Knossós and an outstanding Archeological Museum most famously, but also snatched visions of another city of magnificent fortifications, a wonderful market, the occasional ancient alley and curious smaller museums – and then move on to more immediately inviting places.

Knossós apart, the immediate surrounds of Iráklion offer little compensation. If you are based in the city with time on your hands, then the Minoan remains at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Ahládha
Convent of Savathianá
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Iráklion
Amoudhára
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Márathos
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Gazí
Evgassos (734m)
Knossós
Tílissos
Goniés
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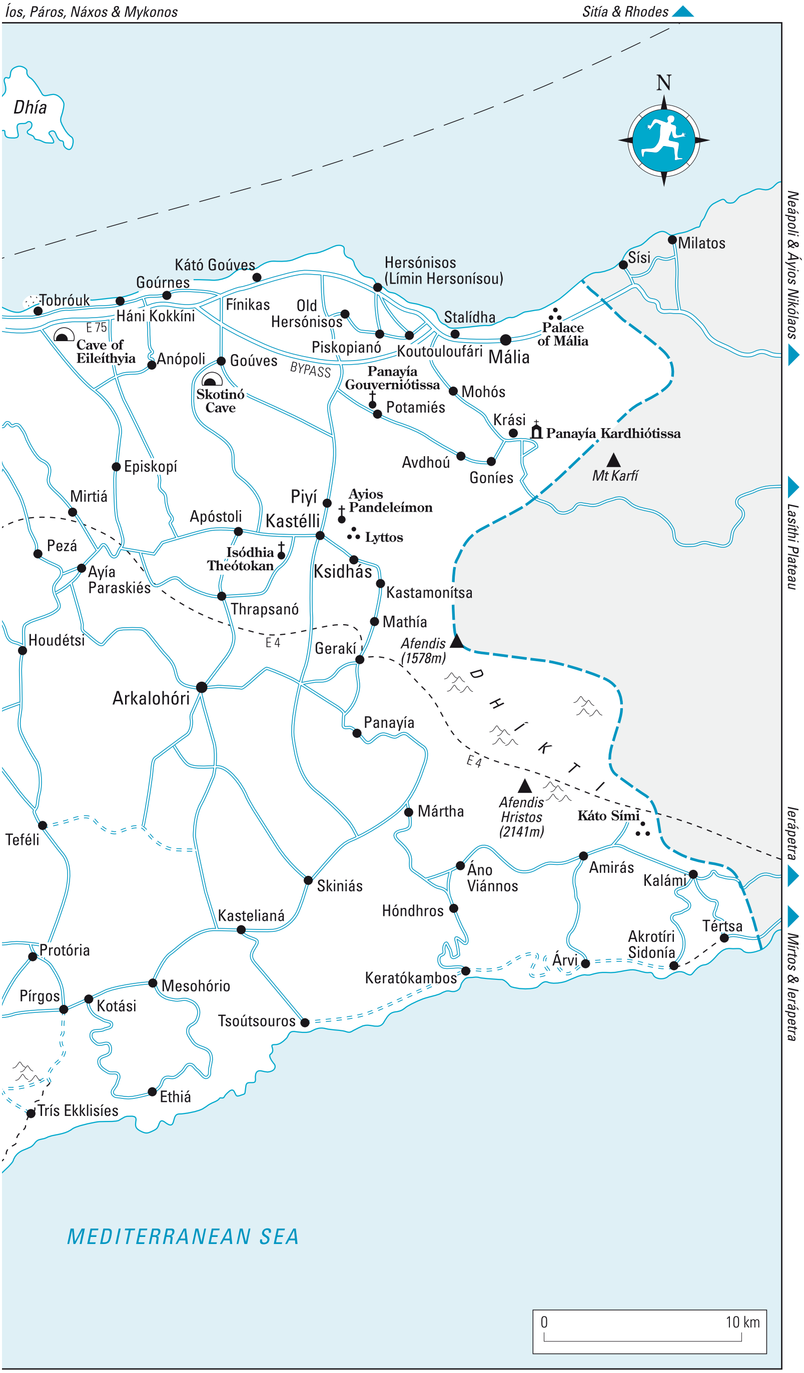
Anemospília
Anóyia
Voutés
Arhánes
Voskero (1199m)
Mt Yioúhtas (811m)
Áyios Míronas
Vathípetro
Krousónas
PSILORÍTIS
Mt Psiloritis (2456m)
Koudouni (1860m)
E 4
Veneráto
Ano Asítes
Idean Cave
Rhizenía
M. Palianí
E 4
Priniás
Roúvas Gorge
Ambelakia (1471m)
Kamáres Cave
M. Vrondísi
M. Áyios Nikólaos
Ayía Varvára
Kamáres
Vorízia
Mouí
Zarós
Valsamónero
Ohi Kefala (807m)
Sanida (880m)
Orthi Petra (505m)
Vourvoulítis Pass
Górtys
Asími
Kókkinos Pírgos
Timbáki
Vóri
Mitropólis
Ayii Dhéka
M. Kalivianí
Hárakas
Ayía Triádha
Festós
Míres
MESSARÁ PLAIN
Vagioniá
Stérnes
Áyios Ioánnis
Yeropotamos
Paranímti
Petrokefáli
Kalamáki
Kamilári
Sívas
Pómbia
KÓFINAS HILLS
Pitsídhia
Kousés
Vigla (659m)
Kommos
Pigaidákia
M. Koudoumá
Mátala
M. Odigítrias
ASTEROÚSSIA HILLS
Perámata
Léndas
Lassaia
Áyio Gorge
Kalí Liménes
Local Boats


Íos, Páros, Náxos & Mykonos
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Cave of
Eileíthyia
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Goúves
Piskopianó
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Mália
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Mirtiá
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Lasíthi Plateau
Ierápetra
Mírtos & Ierápetra

Arhánes or the views from **Mount Yioúhtas** are worth taking in and, thanks to the crowds that rush to escape the city in summer, transport to local **beaches** is excellent.

East of Iráklion, the startling pace of tourist development is all too plain to see. The merest hint of a beach is an excuse to build at least one hotel, and these are outnumbered by the concrete shells of rivals-to-be. It can be hard to find a room in the peak season in this monument to the package tour, and expensive if you do. Some of the resorts, most notably **Mália** and **Hersónisos**, do at least have good beaches and lively nightlife. They wouldn't be at all bad if you were on a package deal – providing you don't mind crowds, noise and commercialism. But turn up hoping to find somewhere to stay on the off-chance and you won't regard them as the most welcoming of places. As a general rule, the further you go, the better things get: even where the road veers briefly inland, a more appealing Crete – of olive groves, tidy villages and picturesque mountain vistas – reveals itself.

West of Iráklion, there's much less to detain you, with mountains that drop virtually straight to the sea. There is just one small, classy resort – in the bay at **Ayía Pelayía** – a few isolated hotels and, in the hills behind, a number of interesting old villages: **Fódhele** is the possible birthplace of El Greco, and **Tílissos** has a famous Minoan villa.

Iráklion

The best way to arrive in **IRÁKLION** is from the sea, the traditional approach and still the one that shows the city in its best light, with Mount Yioúhtas rising behind, the heights of the Psiloritis range to the west and, as you get closer, the great fortress guarding the harbour entrance and the city walls encircling and dominating the oldest part of town.

The reality when you arrive is less romantic: modern ferries are far too large for the old harbour and dock at giant concrete wharves alongside, while on closer inspection what little remains of the old city has been heavily restored, often from the bottom up. The slick renovations often look fake, pristine and polished alongside the grime that coats even the most recent buildings – a juxtaposition that seems neatly to sum up much about modern Iráklion.

A Roman port, Heraclium, stood hereabouts, and the city readopted its name only at the beginning of the twentieth century. Founded by the **Saracens**, who held Crete from 827 to 961, it was originally known as **El Khandak**, after the great ditch that surrounded it, later corrupted by the Venetians to **Candia** or Candy, as Shakespeare titled it in *Twelfth Night*, a name also applied to the island as a whole. This Venetian capital was, in its day, one of the strongest and most spectacular cities in Europe – a trading centre, a staging-point for the Crusades and, as time wore on, the front line of Christendom. The **Turks** finally conquered the city after 21 years of war, which culminated in a bitter siege from May 1667 to September 1669. Under its new Turkish rulers, the city's importance declined in relation to Haniá's, but it remained a major port and the second city in Crete. It was here, too, where the incident occurred that finally put an end to Turkish occupation of the island (see box, opposite). Finally united with **Greece**, Iráklion's future prosperity was assured by its central position.

Almost all that you see today dates only from the last few decades, partly because of the heavy bombing the city suffered during World War II, but above all thanks to Crete's booming agriculture, industry and tourism – the city is now the wealthiest in Greece per head of population. In 1971, Iráklion regained the

Street of the August Martyrs

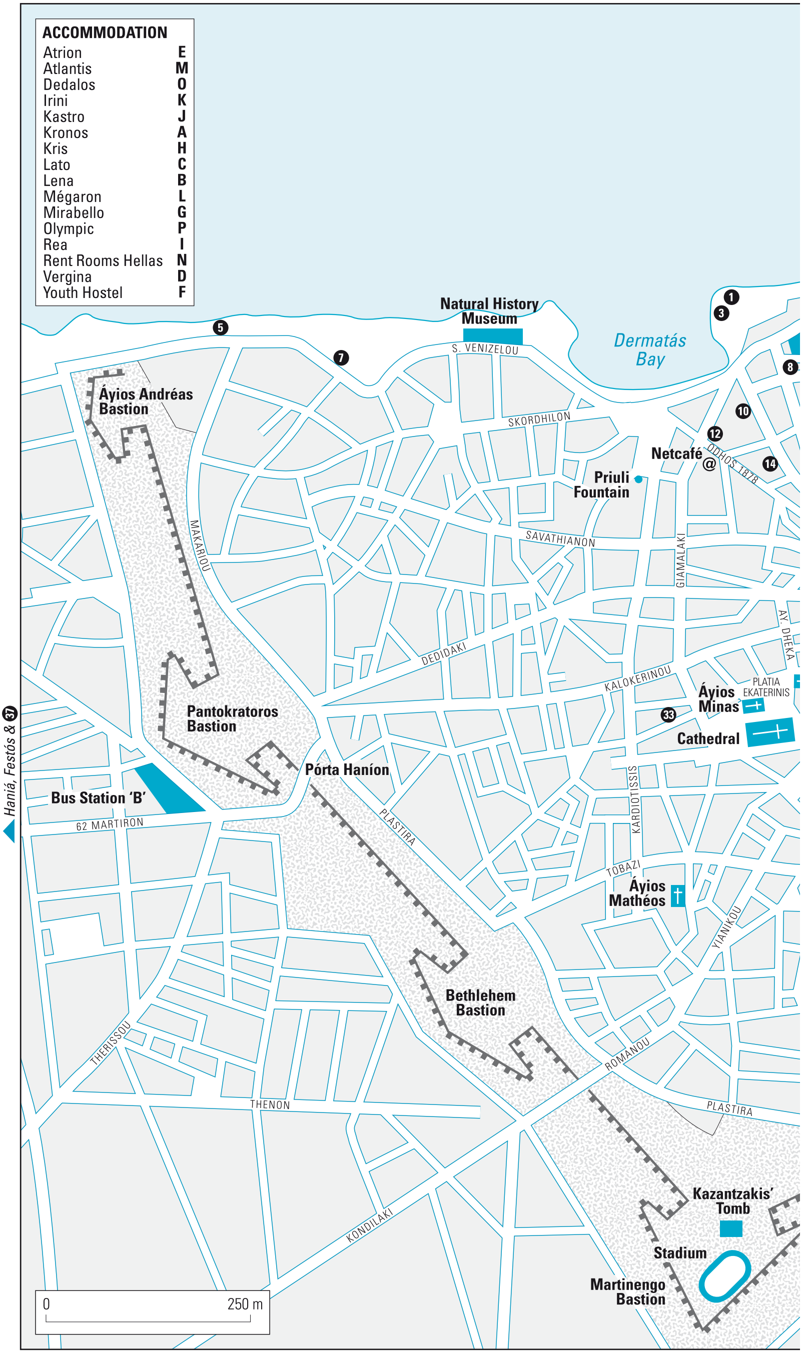
Properly named **Odhós Martírion 25-Avgoústou** (the 25th of August Martyrs), the name of the city's major thoroughfare derives from one of the final acts in the ending of Turkish domination of the island at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898 under the aegis of the great powers of post-Napoleonic Europe (France, Italy, Russia and Britain), an autonomous Cretan state with an Executive Council was formed under Turkish sovereignty, regarded by most Cretans as a prelude to union with Greece. On August 25th a detachment of British soldiers was escorting Council officials along this street from the harbour when they were attacked by a violent mob of Turkish Cretans, smarting at what they saw as the betrayal of their birthright. In the bloody riot that ensued, hundreds of Christian Cretans lost their lives, as did seventeen British soldiers and the British Honorary Consul. This stirred the British to take reprisals and, on the principle of an eye for an eye, they rounded up and hanged seventeen of the Turkish Cretan ringleaders and slapped many more in prison. Shortly after this, the British navy sailed into the harbour and the city was cleared of Turkish troops. The following November the last Turkish military forces left the island they had controlled for 230 years.

official title of island **capital**. Its growth continues, as you'll see if you venture to the fringes of town, where the concrete spreads inexorably, but it can hardly be said to add to the attraction. In recent years, Iráklion's administrators have been giving belated attention to dealing with some of the city's image problems, and large tracts of the walled city have undergone costly landscaping and refurbishment schemes, while many major thoroughfares have been pedestrianized. Whilst Iráklion will never be one of the jewels of the Mediterranean, the ebullient friendliness of its people and an infectious cosmopolitan atmosphere may well tempt you into giving it more than the customary one-night transit.

Orientation, arrival and information

Virtually everything you're likely to want to see in Iráklion lies within the walled city, with the majority of the interest falling into the relatively small sector of the northeastern corner. The most vital thoroughfare, the recently pedestrianized **Odhós Martírion 25-Avgoústou** (see box, above), links the harbour with the commercial city centre. At the bottom it's lined with shipping and travel agencies and car and motorbike rental outfits, but as you climb, these give way to banks, restaurants and city-centre shops. **Platía Venizélou** (Fountain Square, p.89), off to the right, is the town's most popular square, thronged with restaurants and cafés; to the north behind Venizélou is the small **El Greco Park** which, with nearby Hándhakos to the west and Korai to the east, comprises one of the town's main nightlife zones. On the opposite side of 25-Avgoústou from the park are some of the more interesting of Iráklion's older buildings, including the church of **Áyios Títos** and the Venetian Loggia.

At its southern end, 25-Avgoústou meets **Platía Nikifourou Foka**, which forms a junction for central Iráklion's other main arteries: **Kalokerinoú** heads westwards down to the Pórta Haníon and out of the city; straight ahead, Odhós 1821 – a fashionable shopping street – heads southwest towards the obscure Platía Arkadiou, while the adjacent 1866 is given over to the animated **market**, one of the best on the island. To the east of the junction, another major shopping street, **Dhikeosínis**, leads to the expansive **Platía Eleftherías** (Liberty Square), also linked to Platía Venizélou by the pedestrianized alley **Dedhálou**, which is the venue for many of Iráklion's top designer clothing stores. Platía



ACCOMMODATION	
Atrion	E
Atlantis	M
Dedalos	O
Irini	K
Kastro	J
Kronos	A
Kris	H
Lato	C
Lena	B
Mégaron	L
Mirabello	G
Olympic	P
Rea	I
Rent Rooms Hellas	N
Vergina	D
Youth Hostel	F

Natural History Museum
Dermatás Bay
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3
5
7
8
10
12
14
33
S. VENIZELOU
SKORDHILON
Áyios Andréas Bastion
Netcafé
@
ODHOS 1878
Priuli Fountain
SAVATHIANON
MAKARIOU
GIAMALAKI
AY. DHEKA
DEDIDAKI
KALOKERINOU
PLATIA EKATERINIS
Áyios Minas
Cathedral
Pantokratoros Bastion
Pórta Haníon
KARDIOTISSIS
Haniá, Festós & 37
Bus Station 'B'
62 MARTIRON
PLASTIRA
TOBAZI
Áyios Mathéos
YIANIKOU
THERISSOU
Bethlehem Bastion
ROMANOU
THENON
PLASTIRA
KONDILAKI
Kazantzakis' Tomb
Stadium
Martinengo Bastion
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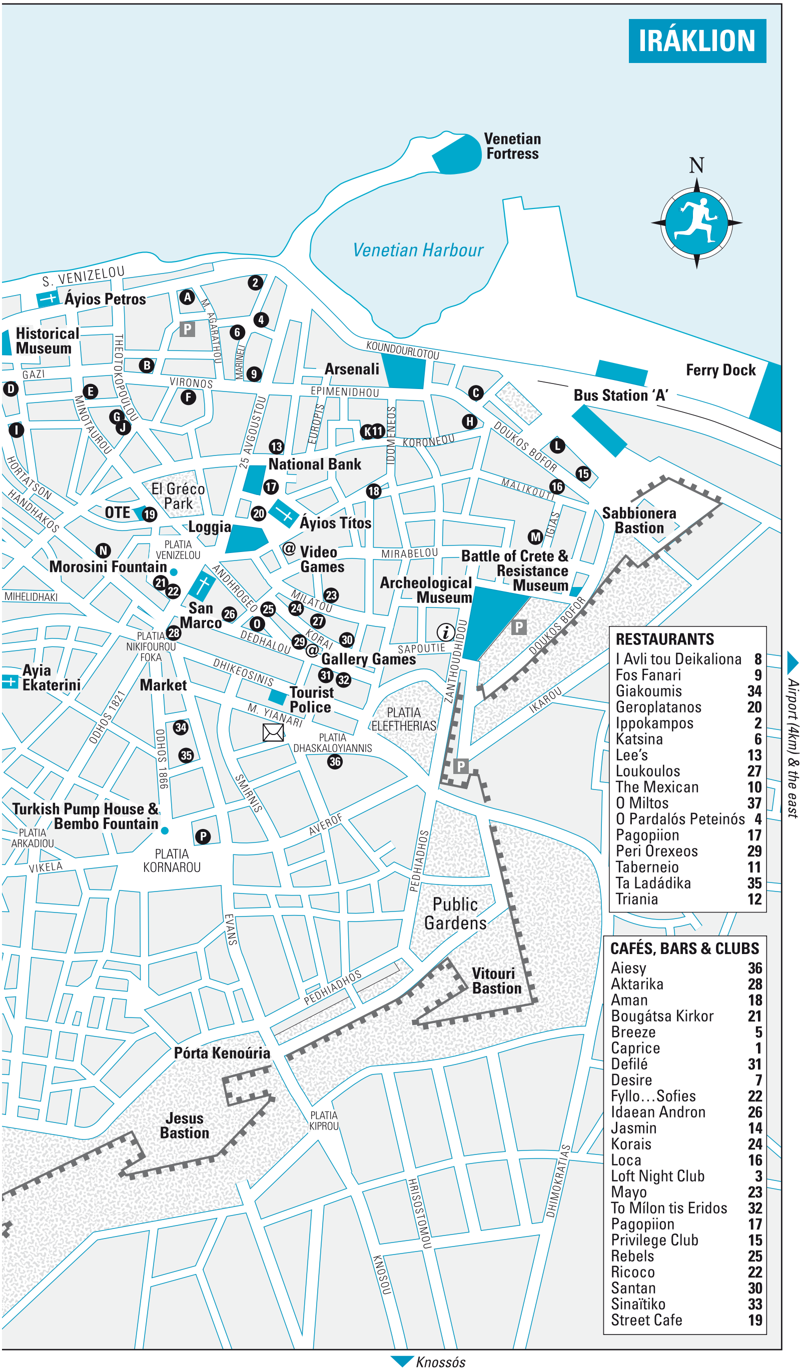
250 m

IRÁKLION


Venetian Fortress
Venetian Harbour
N
S. VENIZELOU
Áyios Petros
Historical Museum
GAZI
M. AGARATHOU
MARINELI
THEOTOKOPOULOU
VIRONOS
MINOTAUROU
KOUNDOURLOTOU
Arsenali
EPIMENIDHOU
Ferry Dock
Bus Station 'A'
25 AVGOUSTOU
EUROPIS
IDOMENEOS
KORONEOU
DOUKOS BOFOR
National Bank
MALIKOUTI
HORTATSON
HANDHAKOS
El Gréco Park
OTE
Loggia
Áyios Títos
Sabbionera Bastion
PLATIA VENIZELOU
Video Games
MIRABELOU
Battle of Crete & Resistance Museum
IGIAS
Morosini Fountain
MIHELIDHAKI
ANDHROGEO
MILATOU
Archeological Museum
San Marco
DEDHALOU
KORAI
SAPOUTIE
ZANTHOUDHIDOU
PLATIA NIKIFOUROU FOKA
DHIKEOSINIS
Gallery Games
Ayia Ekaterini
Market
Tourist Police
M. YIANARI
PLATIA ELEFTHERIAS
IKAROU
ODHOS 1821
ODHOS 1866
PLATIA DHASKALOYIANNIS
SMIRNIS
Turkish Pump House & Bembo Fountain
PLATIA ARKADIOU
VIKELA
PLATIA KORNAROU
AVEROF
PEDHIADHOS
Public Gardens
EVANS
Vitouri Bastion
Pórta Kenoúria
Jesus Bastion
PLATIA KIPROU
HRISOSTOMOU
KNOSOU
DHIMOKRATIAS
Airport (4km) & the east
Knossós

RESTAURANTS

I Avli tou Deikaliona	8
Fos Fanari	9
Giakoumis	34
Geroplatanos	20
Ippokampos	2
Katsina	6
Lee's	13
Loukoulos	27
The Mexican	10
O Miltos	37
O Pardalós Peteinós	4
Pagopiion	17
Peri Orexeos	29
Taberneio	11
Ta Ladádika	35
Triania	12

CAFÉS, BARS & CLUBS

Aiesy	36
Aktarika	28
Aman	18
Bougátsa Kirkor	21
Breeze	5
Caprice	1
Defilé	31
Desire	7
Fyllo…Sofies	22
Idaean Andron	26
Jasmin	14
Korais	24
Loca	16
Loft Night Club	3
Mayo	23
To Mílon tis Eridos	32
Pagopiion	17
Privilege Club	15
Rebels	25
Ricoco	22
Santan	30
Sinaïtiko	33
Street Cafe	19

Eleftherías is very much the traditional centre of the city, both for traffic, now routed around the edge of a refurbished pedestrian area with benches and trees, and for life in general; it is ringed by cafés and bar terraces, and in the evening comes alive with strolling locals.

Arrival

Iráklion **airport**, 4km east of the city, lies right on the coast – you come in to land low over some of the better local beaches. Bus #1 leaves for Platía Eleftherías every few minutes from the car park in front of the terminal; buy your ticket (€0.75) at the booth before boarding. There are also plenty of taxis outside (which you'll need to use if you miss the last bus at 11pm) and prices to major destinations are posted; it's €10 to the centre of town, depending on traffic. Get an agreement on the fare before taking the cab and beware if the driver extols the virtues of a particular hotel – he may be motivated by the prospect of a kickback from the proprietors, rather than your best interests. If you haven't already lined up a place to stay, the central Platía Eleftherías is a good destination to quote to the driver; from here, many of the accommodation options are within easy walking distance.

From the wharves where the **ferries** dock, the city rises directly ahead in steep tiers. If you're heading for the centre on foot, for the Archeological Museum or the tourist office, cut straight up the stepped alleys behind the bus station (from where there are buses to the centre) onto Doúkos Bófor and to Platía Eleftherías (about a 15min walk). For accommodation, though, and to get a better idea of the layout of Iráklion's main attractions, it's simpler to follow the main roads: head west along the coast, past the major eastbound bus station and on by the Venetian harbour before cutting left towards the centre on Odhós 25-Avgoústou.

Arriving in town **by car**, the best bet is to head for one of the signposted city-centre car parks as soon as possible (these are reasonably priced at around €3–6 per day depending on location). One of the best is the large Museum car park on Doúkos Bófor, 70m downhill from the Archeological Museum, which uses space below the city walls and has the bonus of plenty of shade.

There are two main bus stations (often titled A and B on maps). **Bus station A** straddles both sides of the main road (Koundouriotou) between the ferry dock and the Venetian harbour. Buses run from here west to Réthimnon and Haniá and east along the coastal highway to Hersónisos, Mália, Áyios Nikólaos, and Sitía, as well as southeast to Ierápetra and points en route. Local bus #2 to Knossós also leaves from here. Buses for the southwest (Festós, Mátala and Ayía Galíni) and along the inland roads west (Tílissos, Anóyia and Fódhele) operate out of **bus station B** just outside Pórta Haníon, a very long walk from the centre down Kalokerinoú (or jump on any city bus heading along this street).

Information

Iráklion's **tourist office** (May–Sept Mon–Fri 8.30am–9pm, Oct–April Mon–Fri 8.30am–2.30pm; ⓣ28102 46298, ⓦwww.heraklion-city.gr) is just below Platía Eleftherías, opposite the Archeological Museum at Zanthoudhídhou 1. There is also a tourist office at the **airport** (April–Sept daily 8.30am–9pm). The **tourist police** (ⓣ28102 83190; 7am–11pm) – more helpful than most – are on Dhikeosínis, halfway between Platía Eleftherías and the market.

Accommodation

Iráklion has a distinct lack of decent, reasonably priced **accommodation**, especially in the height of summer. If possible, arrive early in the day; roll up after 8pm or so without a reservation and you'll be lucky to find anything at all (though the hostels are always worth a try). In August, on national holidays and around Easter you'd be advised to take any rooms available – you can always set out early next day to find something better. Noise can be a problem wherever you stay; we've indicated some of the more tranquil locations.

There's a good selection of mid-range **hotels** conveniently located in the areas to the east and west of Odhós 25-Avgoústou. For hotels of C class and above (see p.45), it's usually simplest to approach the tourist office first – they should know where there are available rooms and if they're not too harassed can phone for you. At quieter times it's worth trying your luck at some of the B and C class hotels – during slack periods they sometimes reduce prices by fifty percent or more. Any of the accommodation places listed below will usually offer a discount if you plan to stay more than one night.

The greatest concentration of **inexpensive rooms** is to be found near Platía Venizélou, around Hándhakos, in the vicinity of the "A" bus station and near the Venetian harbour. There are a few central, but rather noisy and marginally more expensive places around El Greco Park and by the bottom of the market. Few of the downmarket places offer private bathrooms, but they should all be clean and have hot water.

There are no **campsites** within striking distance of Iráklion. The nearest sites are both to the east of the city – *Camping Creta* (ⓣ28970 41400) at Káto Goúves, 16km east, and *Caravan Camping* (ⓣ28970 22901) at Hersónisos, 28km east.

El Greco Park area

Kastro Theotokopoúlou 22 ⓣ28102 85020, ⓦwww.kastro-hotel.gr. Recently refurbished three-star hotel offering a/c rooms with satellite TV, strongbox, Internet connection, fridge and balcony or terrace. Price includes breakfast. ⑥

Kronos Agarathou 2, west of 25-Avgoústou ⓣ28102 82240, ⓦwww.kronoshotel.gr. Pleasant, modern hotel where a/c en-suite rooms come with sea-view balconies, fridge and TV. *Rough Guide* readers can claim a twenty percent discount. ⑤

Lena Lahana 10 ⓣ28102 23280, ⓦwww.lena-hotel.gr. This quiet and efficient small hotel has en-suite a/c rooms with balcony and TV; the second floor is airier. ④

Mirabello Theotokopoúlou 20 ⓣ28102 85052, ⓦwww.mirabello-hotel.gr. Good-value family-run hotel just north of El Greco Park in a peaceful street. Pleasant balcony rooms with and without bath, most with a/c and TV. ④

Rea Kalimeráki 1 ⓣ28102 23638, ⓕ28102 42189. A friendly, comfortable and clean pension in a quiet street. Some rooms with washbasin, others with own shower. Guests can claim a thirty-percent discount on cars hired with Ritz, the pension's own car hire firm (see p.101. ②

Rent Rooms Hellas Hándhakos 24 ⓣ28102 88851, ⓕ28102 84442. Occupies the small but spruced-up original youth hostel building, and has dorm beds for €7 per person and some doubles sharing bath; facilities include roof garden and snack bar. Also has some private rooms ②.

Vergina Hortátson 32 ⓣ28102 42739. Basic but pleasant rooms with washbasins and shared baths, set around a courtyard with banana trees. ②

Youth Hostel Vironos 5 ⓣ28102 86281, ⓔheraklioyouthhostel@yahoo.gr. The former official youth hostel, now privately operated, this is a good place to stay, with friendly and helpful proprietors. It has plenty of space and some beds (albeit illegal) on the roof, if you fancy sleeping out under the stars. Private rooms (②) as well as dorm beds (€10); hot showers, breakfast and other meals available.

The Port and Venetian harbour area

Atlantis Igias 2 ⓣ28102 29103, ⓦwww.theatlantishotel.gr. Iráklion's premier five-star luxury hotel is aimed at the business market and hosts many conferences. It has all the usual facilities for this category, and its public areas include a roof garden and pool. ⑨

Atrion Chronaki 9 ⓣ28102 46000, ⓦwww.atrion.gr. Attractive, new central hotel where a/c balcony rooms come equipped with satellite TV, strongbox and wireless Internet. Breakfast included. ⑦

Irini Idomeneos 4 ⓣ28102 29703, ⓦwww.irini-hotel.com. Central hotel offering decent rooms with TV, a/c, strongbox, fridge and spacious balconies. ⑥

Kris Doúkos Bófor 2 ☎28102 23211. Friendly proprietor offers studio rooms with kitchenette and fridge; some have balconies overlooking the harbour. ④

Lato Epimenidou 15 ☎28102 28103, ⓦwww.lato.gr. Stylish and luxurious hotel where a/c rooms come with minibar, TV and fine balcony views over the old Venetian port (suites 3, 4 and 5 have the best). There's also a *hamam* (Turkish bath) and gym, making this easily the best of the upmarket places. Breakfast included. ⑧

Megaron Doúkos Bófor 9 ☎28103 05300, ⓦwww.gdmmegaron.gr. Brand-new and welcome addition to the city's upmarket accommodation, sited just above the bus station. Well-equipped a/c balcony rooms (extra for sea views) and a rooftop bar (open to all) with spectacular views over the Venetian harbour. ⑨

Around Platía Eleftherías

Dedalos Dedhálou 15 ☎28102 44812, ⓔinfo@daedalos.gr. Refurbished hotel with balcony rooms overlooking this pedestrianized shopping street which is quiet at night. All rooms are a/c and en suite with TV. ⑤

Olympic Platía Kornárou ☎28102 88861, ⓦwww.hotelolympic.com. Modernized 1960s hotel with double-glazed windows overlooking a busy (and sometimes noisy) square and the famous Bembo and Turkish fountains. Rooms come with a/c, minibar, TV and strongbox. Breakfast included. ⑧

The City

Despite Iráklion's rather cheerless reputation, parts of the old town can be genuinely picturesque. By far the most striking aspect of the city is the weighty **Venetian defences**: the harbour **fortress** and the massive **walls** framing the old quarters where most of the sights are located. Focal to this area are the **Venizélou** and **Eleftherías** squares, and most of the churches, museums and other monuments are just a few minutes' walk from either. The **Archeological Museum**, with the world's foremost collection of Minoan antiquities, lies off Platía Eleftherías. Other sights include the impressive **Museum of Religious Art**, a superb collection of **icons** housed in the church of Ayía Ekaterini and an important **Natural History Museum**.

The Venetian fortress and the Arsenali

The obvious starting point for your explorations is the **Venetian fortress** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €2), which stands guard over the harbour. Built between 1523 and 1540, the fortress was known to the Venetians as the Rocca al Mare, to the Turks as Koule. Painstakingly refurbished, it now often houses temporary exhibitions which may disrupt the standard opening hours. Taken simply as a structure, it is undeniably impressive: massively sturdy walls command superb views over harbour and town and protect a series of chambers (many piled with cannonballs) in which the defenders must have enjoyed an overwhelming sense of security. It is easy to see here how Venetian Iráklion managed to resist the Turks for so long. On the other hand, there is something unsatisfying about the way the edifice has been so thoroughly scrubbed, polished and cosseted, losing any hint of atmosphere in the process. While you may know that this stronghold is the genuine sixteenth-century article from the lions of St Mark adorning the exterior and the simple solidity of the stone, it feels as if it were built yesterday for some swashbuckling Hollywood production. At night, when the fortress is floodlit, the causeway leading to it is the haunt of courting couples, while the niches in the walls provide temporary accommodation for people awaiting ferries or for fishermen: it's a fine place to watch the ships coming and going.

The only other survivors of the Venetian harbour installations are the vaulted **Arsenali** on the harbour's southern flank. Now lost in a sea of traffic scooting hither and thither along the harbour road, here ships were built or dragged ashore to be overhauled and repaired – close up, you may still find bits of broken boat lying about.

The city walls

The **walls** themselves – though well preserved and restored in parts – are rather harder to penetrate and access is often difficult. The easiest approach is to follow Odhós Pedhiádhos south from the back of Platía Eleftherías and find your way up one of the dusty tracks that lead to the top of the rampart. With luck and a little scrambling, you can walk all the way around from here, clockwise, to the Áyios Andréas Bastion overlooking the sea in the west. There are some curious views as you walk around, often looking down onto the rooftops, but the fabric of the walls themselves is rarely visible – it's simply like walking on a dusty path raised above the level of its surrounds. A word of warning, though: usually completely safe in daytime, the walls tend to attract less desirable types from dusk onwards.

On the Martinengo Bastion, facing south, is the **tomb of Níkos Kazantzákis**, Crete's greatest writer (see p.114). Despite his works being banned for their unorthodox views, Kazantzákis' burial rites were performed at Áyios Mínos Cathedral, although no priests officially escorted his body up here. His simple grave is adorned only with an inscription from his own writings: "I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free." At the weekend, Iráklians gather to pay their respects – and to enjoy a free, grandstand view of the matches played by the city's once proud, but now second-string football team Ergotelis (see p.101) in the stadium below.

For more impressive views of the defences, from the outside, stroll out through one of the elaborate gates – the **Pórta Haníon** at the bottom of Kalokerinoú or the **Pórta Kenoúria** at the top of Odhós Evans. Both of these date from the second half of the sixteenth century, when the majority of the surviving defences were completed. Originally thrown up in the fifteenth century, the walls were constantly improved thereafter as Crete became increasingly isolated in the path of Turkish westward expansion: their final shape owes much to Michele Sanmicheli, who arrived here in 1538 having previously designed the fortifications of Padua and Verona. In its day, this was the strongest bastion in the Mediterranean, as evidenced at the Pórta Kenoúria, where the walls are over forty metres thick. The road heading south from this gate (Odhós Knosou) leads to the site of Knossós (see p.102).

If you want to follow the city walls in the other direction, from the sea up, simply head west along the coast for a little over a kilometre from the harbour until you reach them, at the junction of Odhós Venizélos and Efodhou.

The Historical Museum

About 300m from the harbour is the **Historical Museum** (Mon & Wed–Fri 9am–5pm, Tues & Sat 9am–2pm; €3; Ⓦwww.historical-museum.gr). The collection helps fill the gap which, for most people, yawns between Knossós and the present day, and since it's always virtually deserted, wandering around is a pleasure. The **ground floor**, if you're working chronologically, is the place to start; it contains sculptures and architectural fragments from the Byzantine, Venetian and Turkish periods. There are some beautiful pieces, most especially a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century tiered fountain from a Venetian palace. The **first floor** has religious art, wall paintings and documents from the same periods, a reconstruction of a typically domed Cretan church and a rather untypical work by the Cretan artist **El Greco** – a view of Mount Sinai painted around 1570. Upper floors bring things up-to-date with reconstructions of the studies of Níkos Kazantzákis and of the Cretan statesman (and Greek prime minister) Emanuel Tsouderós; photos and documents relating to the occupation of Crete by the Germans, plus the odd helmet and parachute harness; and a substantial selection of folk art – particularly textiles. The recent extension has also given the museum the space to re-create the interior of a Cretan farmhouse. As you leave, take a look behind the museum at the charming Venetian **fountain of Idomeneus** (mentioned by Kazantzákis in his novel *Freedom or Death*, partly obscured in the evening by diners on the terrace of a nearby taverna. Nearby, to the west of here (close to the junction of Gorgolaini and Delmarkhou) lies the impressive **Priuli fountain**, built at the very end of the Venetian period during the long siege of the city by Turkish forces. Sited in what was then the old Jewish quarter, the fountain is based on the form of a Greek temple and used an underground source to supply the city with water after the Turks had destroyed the overground aqueducts.

Odhós 25-Avgoústou and Platía Venizélou

Heading inland from the harbour, the newly pedestrianized Odhós 25-Avgoústou offers a less strenuous walk past more obvious attractions. On the left as you approach Platía Venizélou, the church of **Áyios Títos** commands a lovely little plaza. Originally Byzantine, but wholly rebuilt by the Venetians in the sixteenth century, it was adapted by the Turks as a mosque and rebuilt by them after a major earthquake in 1856. The Orthodox Church renovated the building after the Turkish population left Iráklion, and it was reconsecrated in 1925. A reliquary inside contains the skull of Áyios Títos (St Titus; see p.420). Originally brought to Iráklion from his tomb in Górtys – the rest of the body was never found – the skull was later taken to Venice, where it stayed from the time of the Turkish invasion until 1966. In the Middle Ages, it was regularly and ceremonially exhibited to the people of Iráklion.

On the top side of this square, abutting 25-Avgoústou, stands the Venetian City Hall with its famous **loggia**, reconstructed after the work of earthquakes was compounded by the rigours of World War II. Just past here on the left is

△ Morosini fountain

San Marco, a church very much in the Venetian style which, following its own restoration, is used for exhibitions and occasional lectures or meetings. Under the Venetians it was the cathedral (two interesting carved gravestones survive in what was the altar area), and under the Turks a mosque: nowadays, the church steps make a handy overflow for the cafés in **Platía Venizélou** (the former Venetian Piazza San Marco). In the square, the **Morosini Fountain** (hence the popular name "Fountain Square") dates from the final years of Venetian rule and upon its inauguration in 1628 became central Iráklion's main source of fresh water. On first sight, it's a rather disappointing little monument and for decades attracted little attention. However, a recent cleaning and restoration job now enables the fine marine decoration on the eight apsidal basins to be appreciated close up; the lions on guard, which replaced an original statue of Neptune, are two to three hundred years older than the rest of the structure and wonderfully portrayed.

Odhós 1866 and Platía Kornárou

Odhós 1866 is packed throughout the day with the stalls and customers of Iráklion's **market**. This is one of the few living reminders of an older city, with an atmosphere reminiscent of an eastern bazaar. There are luscious fruit and vegetables, as well as butchers' and fishmongers' stalls and others selling a bewildering variety of herbs and spices, cheese and yoghurt, leather and plastic goods, souvenirs, an amazing array of cheap kitchen utensils, pocket knives and just about anything else you might conceivably need – including a shop halfway down with a fine selection of straw and cotton sun hats. At the far end, you emerge in a quiet square, **Platía Kornárou**, the focal point of which is a beautiful **Turkish pumphouse**. Heavily restored, this hexagonal building houses a welcome café which serves as a lively meeting place for the male octogenarians of this quarter, who converse at the tables under the trees. A small sixteenth-century Venetian drinking fountain beside the café – the **Bembo Fountain** (named after its designer Zuanne Bembo) – incorporates a headless Roman torso imported from Ierápetra. Incidentally, this was the first fountain to supply the town with running water.

Cathedral and Museum of Religious Art

Head down Kalokerinoú from the junction by the market, veer left after about 100m, up Áyii Dhéka or one of the streets immediately after, and you'll reach a large open space beside the **Cathedral of Áyios Mínas**. The cathedral, a rather undistinguished nineteenth-century building, is notable mainly for its size. Just in front, however, stands the tiny original medieval church of Áyios Mínas: the interior is worth a look and contains some interesting icons (if it's closed, ask at the cathedral).

Just at the bottom of the same square, the sixteenth-century church of **Ayía Ekateríni** (daily 9.30am–3.30pm; €2) is the real reason to visit, housing a **Museum of Religious Art** with the finest collection of **Cretan icons** anywhere. Built in the fifteenth century, the church was part of a monastic school which, up to the end of Venetian rule, was one of the centres of the Cretan Renaissance, a last flourish of Eastern Christian art following the fall of Byzantium. Among the school's students were Vitzéntzos Kornáros, author of the Cretan classic *Erotókritos*, and many leading Orthodox theologians; most importantly, however, it served as an art school where Byzantine tradition came face to face with the influences of the Venetian Renaissance. Among the greatest of the pupils was the late sixteenth-century painter **Mihaílis Dhamaskinós**, and six of his works – including the *Adoration of the Magi*, the *Last Supper* and *Christ Appearing to the Holy Women* – form the core of the collection. It was the much-imitated Dhamaskinós who introduced perspective and depth to Byzantine art, while never straying far from the strict traditions of icon painting; in his later works he reverts to a much purer, archaic style. The most famous Cretan painter of them all, **El Greco**, took the opposite course – wholeheartedly embracing Italian styles, to which he brought the influence of his Byzantine training. Although there is little evidence, it's generally accepted that these two – Dhamaskinós and El Greco – were near contemporaries at the school.

Two further icons attributed to Dhamaskinós are in the fourteenth-century church of **Áyios Mathéos**, now sitting below street level on Odhós Taxiárhou Markopoúlou as it leads southwest from the cathedral. Alongside Ayía Ekateríni is the church of **Áyii Dhéka**, a seventeenth-century building that acted as a chapel to the larger church. The square facing Ayía Ekateríni, Platía Ekaterinis, is a pleasant oasis away from the bustle of the town centre and has a few inviting cafés with tables under the trees.

Platía Eleftherías and around

Head left at the market junction and you quickly arrive at **Platía Eleftherías**, where a line of pricey pavement cafés face a rather uninspiring concourse dotted with gum trees and benches. Mainly due to its size the square is one of the city's most popular venues for walking, talking and sitting out. There's a small bust of Níkos Kazantzákis and a larger-than-life statue of Eleftheríos Venizélos (the leading figure in the struggle for union with Greece), staring out over the harbour from the ramparts and looking remarkably like Lenin. Beyond the statue, you reach the entrance to the **Public Gardens**, as often as not half taken over by a funfair, but otherwise relatively peaceful. Above all, however, Platía Eleftherías offers access to the **Archeological Museum**, off its northeast corner, as well as the dusty **Battle of Crete and Resistance Museum** (Mon–Fri 8am–2.30pm; free), on the corner of Doúkos Bófor and Hatzidhaki, which uses photos (many captioned only in Greek) as well as military equipment and uniforms to tell the story of this critical period in the island's modern history. Due to its lacklustre presentation, however, it does not compare with similar museums at Haniá and elsewhere.

The Natural History Museum

Somewhat away from the centre, occupying an old seafront power plant to the west of Dermatás Bay, lies the **Natural History Museum** (*Mouseio Fisikis Istorias Kritis*; check current opening hours and prices at Ⓦ www.nhmc.uoc.gr or Ⓣ 28103 24366). Completely renovated for 2007, the museum's exhibits detail the island's geological evolution, the arrival of humans, and the environment as it would have appeared to the Minoans. There are displays, too, on fossils, rocks, minerals and caves, and the flora and fauna of modern Crete. An emphasis on respect and care for the environment, and on species endangered by tourism and development, is a welcome reflection of the growing awareness of these issues on an island where they have not always been treated as a priority. A **botanical garden** contains living examples of the island's aromatic shrubs and coastal plants.

The Archeological Museum

Iráklion's **Archeological Museum** (April–Sept Mon 1pm–7.30pm, Tues–Sun 8am–7.30pm; Oct–March daily 8am–5pm; €6, free Sun Nov–May; combined ticket for museum and Knossós site €10, under 18s and EU students free; Ⓣ 28102 24630 if you want to check opening details during refurbishment), just off Platía Eleftherías, is one of the major reasons to visit the city. The museum houses far and away the most important collection of **Minoan art** and artefacts anywhere in the world, and a visit to Knossós or the other sites will be greatly enhanced if you've been here first. That said, many visitors are disappointed by the museum's

The Archeological Museum's renovation

A long-overdue renovation of the Archeological Museum began in 2006 and is likely to cause disruption, and even complete closures of the museum, for some years to come. New buildings are projected to house the administration offices, freeing up more space for exhibits, and a new subterranean floor is to be excavated beneath the museum to stage special exhibitions. Once finished, the Iráklion Museum should take a deserved place as one of the foremost museums in Greece, but in the meantime there may be significant inconvenience for visitors.

dreary nineteenth-century style of presentation and sparsely labelled exhibits – most of the innovations in museum design over the past few decades have had little impact here. However, a major **renovation** of the building and reorganization of the collection is now underway, which should improve things dramatically over the next few years (see the box above).

The museum is almost always crowded (at least in summer) and at times becomes overwhelmed by coach parties, with an endless procession of guided tours in all languages monopolizing the major exhibits. It's best to try and see it very early, late, or during everyone else's lunch break. The collection is large and will prove a lot more rewarding in small doses: take in the highlights first time around and go back later for whatever you feel you've missed – tickets are valid for re-entry the same day. Several good **museum guides** are on sale at the bookstore in the entrance foyer: the best are probably the glossy guides by J. A. Sakellarakis and the more recent publication (with better images) by Andonis Vasilakis; either would make an excellent reference work to take home. However, neither is essential, and the following account should give you some idea of what to expect. At least in the old configuration (which is what we follow here) the galleries on the ground floor, which you have little choice but to walk through in order, follow a chronological pattern: they run from the Neolithic era right through to Roman times, with the more important Minoan periods also divided according to where the items on display were discovered. Upstairs, larger rooms show the fabulous Minoan frescoes.

Prehistory to the early Minoans

Room I covers the period from the earliest signs of human settlement (around 6000 BC) to the beginnings of Minoan civilization in the Pre-Palatial period. There's a bit of everything here, of interest mainly because it is so very old: statuettes, including a Neolithic "fertility goddess"; pottery, among which the blotchy **Vasilikí ware** (Case 6) points to the great things to come; and stone jars from the island of Móhlos (Case 7), displaying an early mastery of the lapidary's craft. Among the miniature sculpture, don't miss a **clay bull** (Case 15) with tiny acrobats clinging to its horns – an early sign of the popularity of bull sports. In the central cases, and typical of what is to be seen later in the museum, is a display of sophisticated early **jewellery** alongside some intricately engraved **seal stones** – among the latter, one from ancient Mesopotamia (no. 1098) suggests early contact between the island and its Near Eastern neighbours.

Room II contains objects from the earliest period of occupation of Knossós and Mália (2000–1700 BC), along with items found in various peak sanctuaries of the same era. Archeologically most significant is the **Kamáres ware** pottery, with often elaborate white and red decoration on a dark ground. For casual visitors, however, the miniature figures are of far more immediate interest, in particular the famous "**Town Mosaic**" from Knossós in Case 25. This consists of a series of glazed plaques depicting multistorey Minoan houses, beautiful pieces that probably fitted together to form a decorative scene. Finally, note the **clay statuettes** (Cases 21 and 24) of sanctuary worshippers – their arms crossed or placed on the chest in reverential attitudes – as well as the *taxímata* (ex votos) representing parts of the human body the deity was requested to heal, a custom still followed in churches all over Greece today.

Room III is devoted to the same period at Festós. Here the **Kamáres ware** is even more elaborate, and it was at Festós that this art reached its peak – exemplified by a magnificent vase with sculpted white flowers in high relief. In Case 30 you'll find the original pieces, retrieved from the cave at Kamáres, which gave the style its name. The celebrated **Festós Disc** (Case 41) is a circular slab of clay upon which hieroglyphic characters have been inscribed in a spiral pattern. The disc is frequently described as the earliest-known example of printing, since the impressions of hieroglyphs were made with stamps before it was fired. The various signs are divided up into groups, believed to be words; some are repeated, leading scholars to suggest that what is represented on the disc may be some form of prayer or hymn. Despite a plethora of theories – and claims in several books on sale around the island to "reveal the secret" of the disc – this earliest Minoan script remains undeciphered.

New Palace period

Room IV represents the New Palace period (1700–1450 BC) in which the great sites reached their peak of creativity, rebuilt after the first destruction. Kamáres pottery is now replaced by new styles with patterns painted in dark colours on a light background, and themes drawn from nature (in particular marine life) rather than abstract patterns. The **Jug of Reeds** in Case 49 is a brilliant example of this stylistic development. Other objects are more immediately striking: above all, in Case 51 the renowned **bull's head rhyton**, a sacred vessel used in religious ceremonies and found in the Little Palace at Knossós. Carved from black stone (steatite) with inlaid eyes and nostrils (the wooden horns are new), the bull is magnificently naturalistic. In Case 46 are a number of vessels connected with the snake cult; some of them may have been snake containers. These are pertinent to Case 50, where two representations of the **snake goddess** – both wearing tight-waisted, breast-baring dresses and decorated aprons, each with snakes coiling around their hands – may equally be priestesses engaged in sacred rituals. A delicate ivory acrobat (Case 56), generally accepted to be a bull-leaper, and a faïence relief of a *kri-kri*, or wild goat, suckling her kid (Case 55), also stand out. The **gaming board** in Case 57, from the Corridor of the Draughtsboard at Knossós, is beautiful too – made of ivory, blue paste, crystal, and gold and silver leaf, with ivory pieces – and a further reminder of the luxurious life which some Minoans at least could enjoy. Finally, in Case 44, two small clay cups may hold important clues to the history of Minoan writing, of which so little survives. These vessels bear inscriptions written in Linear A script – developed from the cumbersome hieroglyphic – using cuttlefish ink. This use of ink suggests the existence of other suitable writing materials (possibly imported papyrus or even domestically produced palm-leaf paper) that have not survived.

Room V is devoted to the last period of the palace culture (1450–1400 BC), mainly at Knossós; the objects are considerably less exciting. In pottery, similar decorative themes are used, but with a new formalism and on new types of vessel (such as the giant amphorae against the walls), which has been taken as a sign that Mycenaean influences were beginning to take hold. The numerous **Egyptian objects** found at Knossós are interesting too, providing important evidence of the extent of trade between the two civilizations and, for archeologists, vital ammunition in the war over dates. In Case 70a is a model of a modest **Minoan dwelling**

△ Archeological museum, Iráklion

from Arhánes with small rooms and tiny windows to keep out the bright Cretan sun and fierce winds – the roof terrace above is similar to those seen on village houses throughout Crete today.

Room VI covers finds from cemeteries at Knossós, Festós and Arhánes of approximately the same period. First are some small groups of **clay figures** from a tomb near Festós, in particular one of a ritual dance inside a circle decorated with horns of consecration – very crude work but wonderfully effective and reminiscent of the *pentozalis* danced by Cretan men today. In Case 75a (against the wall) is the curious horse burial found in a fourteenth-century BC thólos tomb at Arhánes, and now believed to be a sacrifice in honour of the possibly royal personage buried in the same tomb. After slaughter, the beast was systematically dismembered and its parts carefully placed in the position in which they are now displayed. In the centre of the room is some of the museum's finest **jewellery**: gold signet rings, necklaces of gold and beads, and other gold work demonstrating the subtle granulation typical of Minoan style. The martial arts are represented by some fine gold sword hilts and two fabulous **helmets**, one of boar's tusks (reconstructed), the other of bronze with long cheekpieces. Taken with the other weapons displayed here, these items can be seen as further proof of the subordination of Minoan culture to the more warlike Mycenaean in this period.

Minor sites and jewellery

Room VII backtracks slightly in time to include objects from minor sites – mostly small villas and sacred caves, but also incorporating the larger complex of Ayía Triádha – throughout the main palace period and beyond (1700–1300 BC). As you enter, you'll see great bronze double axes, erected on wooden poles, stone horns of consecration and bronze cauldrons set about the room. In the cases themselves are some very famous pieces, in particular the three **stone vases** from Ayía Triádha and the **gold jewellery** from a grave near Málía. The "Harvesters Vase" is the finest of the three vases, depicting with vivid realism a procession returning home from the fields; the harvesters are led by a strangely dressed character with long hair and a big stick, possibly a priest, and accompanied by musicians, one of whom is waving a *sistrum* (a percussion instrument which sounds rather like a maraca). The other two show scenes from boxing and wrestling matches and a chieftain receiving a report from an official.

The Mália jewellery is to be found in a single case (101) in the centre of the room – worth seeing above all is the intricate **pendant of two bees** around a golden disc (the latter supposedly a drop of honey which they are storing in a comb). Beside it are a number of other gold animal pendants, as well as necklaces and rings. Some **bronze figurines** in Case 89 depict worshippers making the ritual "salute" gesture to the deity whilst leaning backwards, and there's also a rare depiction of an older man released from the constriction of the customary tight belt, demonstrating that not all Minoans had such sylph-like figures as their art would lead you to believe.

Zákros and the eastern sites

Room VIII is given over to finds from the palace at Zákros (1700–1450 BC) and again includes several superlative items. There's a magnificent **rhyton of rock crystal** with a handle of beads and a collar that hides a join between two pieces encased in gold (Case 109). Its beauty aside, this exhibit is always singled out by guides as an example of the painstaking reconstruction undertaken by the museum – when discovered, it was broken into more than three hundred fragments. Also striking, in Case 111, is the **Peak Sanctuary Rhyton**, a green stone vessel on which a low-relief scene depicts a mountain shrine with horns of consecration decorated with birds and wild goats. Originally covered in gold leaf, this discovery provided valuable information on Minoan religion. Room VIII also has a fine display of pottery from both palace and town, mostly from the zenith of the **marine and floral periods**. Finally, there are some outstanding stone and ceramic miniatures – shells and a butterfly in particular – and an assortment of the craftsmen's raw materials: a giant elephant's tusk, burnt in the fire which destroyed the palace, and unused ingots of bronze from the storerooms.

Room IX contains discoveries of the same period from lesser sites in the east. As usual, there is an assortment of pottery and everyday objects, the most important of which are a series of **terracotta figurines** from a peak sanctuary at Piskoképhalo (Case 123). These naturalistic figures are fascinating in that they show what ordinary Minoans must have looked like and how they dressed – albeit for worship. Also in this room (Case 128) is the museum's largest collection of **seal stones**. Two things stand out about these. First, the intricacy of the carving, superbly executed in tiny detail on the hardest of stones, and second, the abundance of different themes (for obvious reasons, no two seals are the same) relating to almost every aspect of Minoan life, from rare portraits of individuals to religious ceremonies, hunting scenes and, most commonly, scenes from nature. The seals were used to fasten parcels or clay amphorae and for signing correspondence – a number of impressions of seals in clay have survived from Minoan times, mostly baked hard in accidental fires. Some of the larger seals, especially those in precious stones or with non-natural designs, may also have seen use as charms or amulets.

The post-Minoan age

Room X begins the museum's post-Minoan collection, covering a period (1400–1100 BC) when Crete was dominated by Mycenaean influences. The stylization and repetition of the themes employed in pottery decoration, coupled with a near-abandonment of the highly skilled craft of stoneworking, are obvious indications of artistic decline. Figurines from the sanctuaries are also far less naturalistically executed; there are many examples of a stereotyped goddess, both hands raised, perhaps, in blessing. An evocative clay sculpture of a **dancing group** with a lyre player from Palékastro (Case 132) does seem to echo past achievements, though even here the permeation of Mycenaean design is apparent.

Room XI continues the theme into the period of the arrival of Dorian Greeks (1100–900 BC). Among the Minoans, the goddess with raised hands remained important. The anguished features of the example from Mount Karfí (Case 148) – a remote mountain above the Lasíthi Plateau to where many Minoans fled from the vulnerable coastal areas – seem to foreshadow the end. The newcomers introduced stylistic changes: the **clay cart** drawn by curiously portrayed body-less oxen is a new form of ritual vessel. The passing of the Bronze Age is reflected in Case 153: the metal of the new age was iron, which came to be used for the vast majority of weapons and tools. But some Minoan beliefs and traditions survived, such as worship at the cave sanctuary of the Minoan goddess of childbirth, Eileíthyia, to the east of Iráklion; cases 149 and 158 display votive offerings from the cave dating from Hellenistic and Roman times. Some clay figurines portray couples engaged in sexual intercourse, pregnant women or women giving birth – leaving the goddess in little doubt as to what was required of her.

Room XII takes the collection up to about 650 BC. The early part of the period simply shows a development of the art of the previous era; later exhibits betray eastern, notably Egyptian, influences. This is most evident in the pottery, which is decorated with griffins, and with figures which would look at home in Tutankhamun's tomb. An interesting jug in Case 163 is typical of this era: on the vessel's neck two lovers – thought by some to be Theseus and Ariadne – embrace fondly.

Cases 160 and 161 display figurines and artefacts found at the remote mountain shrine of **Káto Sími** near Áno Viannós in the southeast of Iráklion province (see p.159). As the objects on view from the Minoan, Greek and Roman periods demonstrate, this is one of the few shrines in Crete where worship continued without interruption from pre-historical times to the end of antiquity. Notable pieces include bronze figurines of worshippers and ivory-handled swords from the Minoan age, and a figurine of Hermes playing a lyre from the Hellenistic period (the Greeks dedicated Káto Sími to this deity).

Room XIII contains a collection of **lárnakes** (clay coffins) from various periods, their painted decoration reflecting the prevailing pottery style. The Minoan burial position of knees drawn up to the chest explains the small size of the coffins – and also suggests that the bodies would have been placed in them soon after death, before the onset of rigor mortis. They come in two basic shapes: chests with lids and "bathtubs" (which may well have been used as such during their owners' lifetimes). A small section in this room deals with the theme of "**Sports in Ancient Crete**" and includes a selection of sculptures and artefacts relating to "sporting activities" on the island in ancient times. A fascinating wall painting discovered in a sixteenth-century BC tomb at Tel el Daba in Egypt seems to depict Minoans (identifiable by their distinctive dress and hair styles) practising bull jumping. From here, stairs lead to the rooms on the second floor.

The palace frescoes

Upstairs, **Room XIV**, the **Hall of the Frescoes**, is perhaps the most exciting in the museum – and warrants another visit if, by now, you're too weary to appreciate it. Only tiny fragments of actual frescoes survived, but they have been almost miraculously reconstituted and mounted on backgrounds that continue the design to give as true an impression of the entire fresco as possible. Frescoes are among the greatest achievements of Minoan art: they were originally painted directly onto wet plaster, using mostly plant dyes but also colours from mineral sources and even shellfish – a technique that has ensured their relatively unfaded survival. The job of the restorers was helped to an extent by knowledge of the various conventions, which matched Egyptian practice: men's skin, for example, was red, women's white; gold is shown as yellow, silver as blue and bronze, red.

Most of the frescoes shown in the museum come originally from Knossós and date from the New Palace period (1700–1450 BC). Along the left-hand wall are four large panels from the enormous fresco that led all the way along the Corridor of the Procession at Knossós; an artist's impression shows how the whole might originally have looked. Two groups of youths are shown processing towards a female figure, presumably a priestess or goddess. Between the doors there's the **fresco of griffins** from the Throne Room at Knossós, and then, on the far side, a series from the villa at Ayía Triádha, some blackened by fire. Among these, the animation of the wild cat is especially striking; a floor painting of a seascape is also shown here. The opposite wall signals a return to Knossós, with some of the most famous of the works found there: the shields that adorned the Grand Staircase; the elegant **priest-king**, or Lily Prince; the great relief of a bull's head; a heavily restored fresco depicting elegantly attired ladies of the court; a beautifully simple fresco of dolphins from the queen's apartment; and the famous depiction of athletes leaping over a bull. Finally, there are two simple pictures of lilies from the walls of a villa at Amnísos (see opposite).

In some ways more striking than the frescoes themselves – because nothing has been restored or reconstructed – is the **Ayía Triádha sarcophagus**, decorated in the same manner, which stands in the centre of the room. The only stone sarcophagus to be found in Crete, its unique and elaborate painted-plaster ornamentation has led archeologists to assume that it was made originally for a royal burial and later reused. On one side is an animal sacrifice, with a bull already dead on the altar and two goats tied up awaiting their fates. On the other are two scenes, perhaps of relatives making offerings for the safe passage of the deceased. The ends feature a scene of goddesses riding in a chariot drawn by griffins, and of two women in a chariot pulled by goats above a procession of men. Also in this room is a wonderful wooden model of the **Palace of Knossós**.

Rooms XV and XVI have more **frescoes** of the same period. The most famous of them is "**La Parisienne**", so dubbed for her bright red lips, huge eyes, long hair and fancy dress, but in reality almost certainly a priestess or a goddess if her twin image on the next panel has been interpreted correctly. Among other fresco fragments here, the most interesting is the "**Saffron Gatherer**". Originally reconstructed as a boy, it has since been decided that this in fact represented a blue monkey; the two versions are shown side by side. Nearby is the "**Captain of the Blacks**", a work from the troubled end of the New Palace period. It apparently shows a Minoan officer leading a troop of African soldiers, probably Sudanese mercenaries – a sign of the period's increasing militarism.

Room XVII houses the "Ring of Minos" exhibition, focused on the so-called **ring of King Minos**. Originally found seventy years ago close to the Knossós palace, the large, solid gold ring was at first thought to be a forgery, and later disappeared whilst in the possession of a local priest: it re-emerged at the beginning of this century when one of the priest's descendants sold it to the museum. Now accepted as genuine, it is engraved with a scene showing a hilltop shrine and a goddess with worshippers as well as a sailing boat – important evidence of Minoan life.

Yiamalakis Collection, Archaic and Roman Crete

The **Yiamalakis Collection**, the private accumulations of an Iráklion doctor and antiquities collector, and the displays on Roman and Archaic Crete have been closed for some time awaiting the museum's renovation. Highlights when they are once again on view include, from the Minoan period, some stunning gold jewels, especially the bull's head and two other pieces of the "Zákros Treasure". Archaic and Roman objects include mosaics, a collection of Roman **oil lamps** upon which – if you strain your eyes – are featured some fairly saucy erotic images, and plenty of sculpture.

City beaches

If all this culture has finally become overwhelming, it is easy to escape the city for a few hours to lie on the **beach**. The simplest course is to head east, beyond the airport, to the municipal beach at Amnísos or to the marginally quieter Tobróuk beach. Beaches to the west are less prone to aircraft noise but are also more commercialized.

For the **eastern beaches**, bus #7 departs every fifteen minutes or so from the tree-shaded stop opposite the *Hotel Astoria* in Platía Eleftherías. Once past the airport you follow the old road down to the coast where there are various options: a couple of areas are fenced-off as pay beaches with showers, changing rooms and other facilities. Between them there are plenty of free spots, perhaps best in **Amnísos**, where there are a couple of tavernas and food stalls immediately behind the beach, and showers and loungers for hire on it. There's good sand and clean water although the stream of planes coming in to land directly over your head can be wearing. Just beyond Amnísos, the beach at **Tobróuk** is arguably even better, with more tavernas and drink stalls, slightly fewer people, and relative peace to be found if you walk a little way along the sand.

Amnísos itself is a famous name in Minoan archeology, and through a fence you can glimpse the remains of the small settlement here. This was apparently a port for Knossós, from which the Cretan forces engaged in the Trojan War are said to have set sail, and it was in a villa here that the unusual **Fresco of the Lilies** was found – now on display in the Iráklion Archeological Museum (see opposite). In the hills behind is the locked and inaccessible **Cave of Eileíthyia**, which gets a mention in the *Odyssey* as one of Odysseus's stopovers on his way home from Troy.

The beaches to the **west** of the city are less noisy but also less atmospheric, more exposed to the wind and waves and more developed than the eastern ones. Bus #6 heads from the *Hotel Astoria* in Platía Eleftherías out through the Pórta Haníon (Haniá Gate) and into Iráklion's more prosperous western extremities. Eventually, you'll end up on a road which runs along the coast and through the strip-development of **Amoudhára**, finally ending up at the luxury *Creta Beach* hotel complex, unappealingly sited immediately before the power station and cement works (see p.99 for some excellent fish tavernas here). You can get off almost anywhere in this area and attempt to get to **Amoudhára Beach**, though this is not always easy; the beach is open to the public, but there are very few access roads to it.

Shopping

The market is best for food as well as for cheap practical goods, leatherware and most standard tourist items. **Herbs** make an unusual souvenir from Crete – one of the best places to buy is at the stall belonging to Kostas Stathakis along Odhós 1866, about 50m from the junction with Dhikeosínis, on the right. Sweet-smelling dried Cretan thyme is like no other, and red saffron is a real bargain here, but get the fine strands and not the powdered stuff. More upmarket shops – jewellery, clothes and fabrics especially – can be found along Dedhálou as well as Odhós 1821 and Odhós Evans (east and west of the market respectively) and nearby Odhós Averof. Small minimarkets in tourist areas are open every day, there's a reasonably large branch of the supermarket chain Kalkiadakis on the north side of El Greco park and out towards Amoudhára on the west side of town is a Continent hypermarket. CDs and cassettes of Cretan and Greek music including *lyra* and *rembétika* can be purchased at Aerakis, Dedhálou 35, or Fragkákis, Odhós 1821 6, near the entrance to the market.

Eating

When it comes to **eating**, Iraklion's wealth – which is not exclusively reliant on the tourist trade – sees to it that there are plenty of places where you can dine out. In recent years standards have been rising and there are a range of tavernas and restaurants within the city walls that are well worth seeking out. Prices at most are reasonable. The cafés and tavernas of the main squares – **Venizélou** and **Eleftherías** – are quintessential places to sit and watch the world pass by, but their food is on the whole expensive and mediocre. The cafés and tavernas on and around **Dedhálou**, the pedestrianized street linking the two main squares, are popular with tourists too, but again are not particularly good value. For better quality and reasonably priced food, you need to get away from the more obvious tourist haunts; one atmospheric option is to head for the little alley **Fotiou Theodosaki**, which runs through from the market to Odhós Evans, and is entirely lined with the tables of rival tavernas, catering for market traders and their customers as well as tourists.

At the basic end of the scale, **takeaways** are widely available. There's a whole group of *souvláki* stalls, for instance, clustering around the south end of 25-Avgoústou at the entrance to El Greco Park; the park itself is handy if you need somewhere to sit and eat. For *tyrópita* and *spanakópita* (cheese or spinach pies) and other pastries, sweet or savoury, there's no shortage of *zakharoplasteía*; try *Everest*, just north of the Morosini fountain, which does takeaways of these as well as a whole bunch of other savouries.

Restaurants

There are good **restaurants** scattered across town. Just off Eleftherías at **Platía Dhaskaloyiánnis** (where the post office is) are some inexpensive, if not exceptional, tavernas. The *platía* is a good place to break your tour of the nearby Archeological Museum; close at hand are a couple of authentic *ouzerís* (try *Ta Asteria* or *40 Kymata*) serving up tasty *mezédhes*. Nearer **Venizélou**, you could explore some of the backstreets to the east, off Dedhálou and behind the loggia. Down around the **harbour**, you'll find a number of slightly more expensive restaurants, many specializing in fish. Far more promising just to the south is a line of *ouzerís*, plying fish *mezédhes*, along the narrow **Marineli** (a passage leading into Platía Áyios Dimítrios, with a pint-sized church of the same name). On the unpromising coastal outskirts west of town is a trio of fish tavernas worth seeking out.

I Avli tou Deikaliona Kalokairinoú 8, at the rear of the Historical Museum ☎ 28102 44215. Very popular taverna *ouzerí* with a great little terrace fronting the Idomeneus fountain, serving up excellent meat and fish dishes. In high summer, you may need to book to ensure an outdoor table. Open evenings only. If you despair of getting a table, the nearby *Paraskevas* with similar fare and terrace is a good substitute.

Fos Fanari Marineli 1, opposite the tiny church of Ay. Dimítrios. The first in a row of *ouzerí*s that line this alley off Vironos, sloping down to the harbour. Good fish dishes and *mezédhes*. The neighbouring (but pricier) *Terzáki* is also worth a try.

Geroplatanos In the square fronting the church of Ay. Títos. Taking its name from the great old plane tree beneath which its tables are set out, this is one of the most tranquil lunch spots in town and provides the usual taverna staples.

Giakoumis Fotiou Theodosaki 5, in the market ☎28102 84039. Established in 1935, this is the city's oldest taverna and locals claim it serves up the best *païhdákia* (lamb chops) on the island – some tribute given the competition. You can wash them down with the *hyma* (house) wine produced by Lyrarakis, a noted Pezá vineyard.

Ippokampos Sófokli Venizélou, west of 25-Avgoústou, close to the *Kronos* hotel. This seafront *ouzeri* serves up the best and least expensive fish to be had in town, served in unpretentious surroundings. Highly popular with locals, it's often crowded late into the evening, and you may have to queue or turn up earlier than the Greeks eat. Has a pleasant shaded terrace fronting the sea and the waiters dice with death as they to and fro across the busy road with plates of food.

Katsina Marineli 12. A simple and friendly *ouzerí* serving tasty and economical seafood *mezédhes* at outdoor tables.

Ta Ladádika Tzikritzi 5, near the market. Welcoming little *ouzerí* in small pedestrianized street with outdoor tables. Excellent *mezedhés* – try their *dolmadhákia* (stuffed vine leaves).

Lee's Koroneou 21, just north of Platía Áyios Títos. Iraklion's first Vietnamese-Chinese fast-food diner, where you can eat in or take away. Prices are economical and house specialities include Vietnamese noodles and Chinese spring rolls.

Loukoulos On the alley Koraí, parallel to Dedhálou ☎28102 24435. Rather snooty garden restaurant with an Italian slant to its international menu; diners come here to be pampered by over-fussy service and prices to match.

The Mexican Hándhakos 71. Inexpensive Mexican tacos and beers, complimented by salads and bean dishes.

O Miltos Linoperamata, 5km west of the centre ☎28108 21584. Excellent, friendly fish taverna with a terrace overlooking the sea. This is one of a cluster of economical fish tavernas owned by three competing brothers. *Taverna Delfini*, which has the best reputation, and *I Kalouba* are the others here, but unlike *O Miltos*, are open eves only. You'll need your own transport or a taxi to get here; they are located on the sea 1km west of the city's power station, with its distinctive red and white chimney stacks, and close to the Aget Iraklis cement factory – but don't let that put you off.

Pagopiion Platía Áyios Títos ☎28103 46028. This is the mid-priced restaurant of Iráklion's most original bar (see p.100) serving Cretan and international dishes to a high standard; the expansive wine list has bottles from little-known but excellent small vineyards in Crete and on the mainland. There's also a recommended fixed-price weekday three-course lunch for €18 and *mezedhákia* buffet (Sat 12.30–4.30pm) that enables you to fill a plate for €6.

O Pardalós Peteinós Marineli 12. This new arrival has a Macedonian chef but offers a range of *mezedhés* from Crete, the mainland and the wider Mediterranean. Specials include *pita kaisáreias* (Caesarea pie) with sausage, cheese and green peppers wrapped in pastry and the house wine (white or red) is from the Lyrarakis vineyard.

Peri Orexeos On the alley Koraí, parallel to Dedhálou. This newly opened taverna is a good bet for traditional Cretan cooking at reasonable prices.

Taberneio Idomeneos 4, near the Arsenali. Good little neighbourhood taverna offering a wide selection of *mezédhes* and traditional meat-based dishes, plus some more adventurous Indian and Chinese possibilities.

Triania Odhós-1878, west of the centre. Excellent, unpretentious *mezédhes* place offering a variety of fish and vegetable choices, with a small street terrace.

Cafés

Several **cafés** in Venizélou and at the top of Dhikeosínis specialize in luscious pastries to accompany a strong mid-morning coffee; local treats include *bougátsa* and *loukoumades*.

Aktarika N. Foká 5, the alleyway between Dhikeosínis and Dedhálou, near the entrance to the market. This café specializes in *loukoumades*: you can watch the yeasty dough bubbling away before it is dropped into hot oil to cook, then served with honey syrup, sesame seeds and crushed nuts. These confections are traditionally taken with a glass of cold water.

Bougátsa Kirkor Facing the Morosini fountain in Venizélou. The place to sample authentic *bougátsa*, a creamy cheese pie served warm and sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon.

Fyllo…Sofies Next door to *Bougátsa Kirkor* (see above). Another classic *bougátsa* place, with tables on the square.

Sinaïtiko Platía Ayia Ekateríni, near the cathedral. One of a number of relaxing cafés on this pleasant square with tables under the trees.

Street Cafe Kandanoléon 2. A good breakfast place on the southwestern side of El Greco Park which offers a wide range of cakes and pastries as well as the usual standards, such as *tirópita* and *spanakópita*.

Drinking and entertainment

For **nightlife**, and because it's a university town, Iráklion has plenty of clubs and nightspots where you can let your hair down. As with the island generally young Cretans tend to be more into sitting and chatting with background sounds rather than energetic clubbing and dancing; consequently large areas of Koraï and the surrounding streets have been turned into outdoor lounges with lines of expansive sofas and armchairs. In addition to the central zone nightlife, venues are also to be found in the suburbs or out along the hotel strip to the west at Amoudhára. A phenomenon over recent years has been the arrival of a new breed of **kafeníon** emerging in Iráklion, aimed at a younger crowd: the drinks are cocktails rather than *raki*, the music is modern Greek or Western, and there are prices to match.

There are also a number of **cinemas** scattered about: check the posters at the tourist police office for programme details. The Teatro Níkos Kazantzákis at the Jesus Bastion (along the old walls) doubles up as an open-air cinema when it's not being used for staging the city's summer arts and music festival. The Astoria Cinema in Platía Eleftherías shows many new-release films in their original language.

Bars

Bars congregate in the same areas as the restaurants. Perhaps the most animated are in Platía Koraí, a square and adjoining street behind Dedhálou, while slightly more touristy alternatives are centred around Platía Venizélou and on the fringes of El Greco Park. After ten at night, a lively bar scene also fans out into the streets along and around **Hándhakos** – just follow the crowds.

Aiesy Platía Dhaskaloyiánnis. This laid-back café-bar casts off its daytime serenity after 10pm, when locals gather to sink into the canvas chairs on the square, listen to soft rock and sip long drinks.

Defilé Platía Koraí. Trendy bar frequented by students, on this pleasant square just to the north of Dedhálou.

Idaean Andron Perdhíkari 1, just east of Platía Venizélou. A good example of the new-style *kafeníon*, with an amiable, easy atmosphere.

Jasmin Ayiostefanitón 6, tucked in an alley on the left midway down Hándhakos. One of several similar bars on this street, *Jasmin* is another good night-time rendezvous, with jazz, soul and Latin music, and an outdoor terrace. Also serves 45 different types of tea, including herbal varieties.

Korais On the alley Koraí, parallel to Dedhálou. Glitzy and spacious open-air café with sofas, soft lights, overhead movie screens and music – highly popular with Iráklion's stylish set.

Mayo Milatou 11, just north of Koraí. This night-time extravaganza of a bar with spotlights, screens and music under a big canopy terrace is *the* place to be seen for Iráklion's student crowd. Its arrival has spawned a whole new set of bars and cafés along the same street.

To Mílon tis Eridos Platía Korai, facing *Flash*. This café-bar serves everything from twelve types of coffee to cocktails and herbal teas, including *diktamo* (Cretan dittany).

Pagopiion (Ice Factory), Platía Áyios Títos. Stunningly stylish bar created by photographic artist Chryssy Karelli inside Iráklion's former ice factory. She has preserved much of the old building including a lift for hauling the ice from the basement freezer and a fascistic call to duty in German Gothic script on one wall – a remnant of Nazi occupation of the factory in World War II. The toilets are in an artistic league of their own. Outside July-Aug there are frequent jazz concerts featuring big-name artists, and an upstairs theatre stages art shows and fringe theatre.

Rebels Perdhíkari 3. A trendy bar which has cloned numerous similar places nearby. On weekends in summer, this whole zone is *the* place to be if you're under 30.

Ricoco Facing the Morosini fountain in Platía Venizélou. This rooftop café has a superb roof terrace with a fine view over the fountain and square. It's reached via a lift in an arcade behind *Bougátsa Kirkor* (see p.99).

Santan Platía Koraí. One of a number of similar places here with outdoor tables serving a variety of exotic (and expensive) beers and cocktails – those on a tight budget can nurse a *frappé* for hours.

Clubs and discos

Intown **clubs** and **discos** are largely unexciting, with a playlist dominated by techno interspersed with Greek pop music – for livelier nightlife you're better off heading to the nearby resorts. **Nightclubs** are clustered around the harbour near the bus station and out west along the seafront.

Aman Junction of Odhós Ay. Títos and Idomeneos, slightly east of Áyios Títos church. Three bars and cinema screens around the dance floor project films and video clips. There are similar places nearby including *Hijaz*, a lively music bar. Open Oct–May only.

Loca Foot of Doúkos Bófor, close to the *Privilege Club*. Popular dancing place with a terrace at the back overlooking the harbour.

Loft Night Club Dermatás Bay near the Natural History Museum. Despite its name this is more open-air bar than nightclub and its clientele perch on bar stools or lounge on sofas listening to cool sounds. The nearby and similar *Caprice* on the same bay, along with *Desire* and *Breeze* further west along the coast road, allow for a change of scene.

Plus Soda Amoudhára. One of the biggest and best of the many clubs in this western beach suburb.

Privilege Club The most popular of the clubs down towards the harbour at the bottom of Doúkos Bófor, below the Archeological Museum.

Listings

Airlines Olympic, 25-Avgoústou 27 (☎28102 37203, Ⓦwww.Olympicairlines.com) and Aegean, Dhimokratias 11 (☎28103 30475, Ⓦwww.aegeanair.com) are the main scheduled airlines with connecting flights to Athens and other parts of Greece. Charter airlines flying into Iráklion mostly use local travel agents as their representatives.

Airport information ☎28102 29191. Bus #1 runs from Platía Eleftherías to the airport every few minutes; buy a ticket (€0.75) from the booth on the square first.

Banks The main branches are on 25-Avgoústou, many of which have 24hr ATMs; there are more machines at banks along Dhikeosínis.

Bike and car rental 25-Avgoústou is lined with rental companies, but you'll often find less expensive rates on the backstreets; it's always worth asking for discounts, especially during low season or slack periods. Good places include Blue Sea, Kosma Zotou 7 off the west side of 25-Avgoústou (☎28102 41097) for cars and bikes; Alianthos, Íkarou 97 and at the airport (☎28103 90482); Kosmos, 25-Avgoústou 15 (☎28102 41357); Caravel, 25-Avgoústou 39 (☎28103 00150); Ritz in the *Hotel Rea*, Kalimeráki 1 (☎28102 23638) and Sun Rise, 25-Avgoústou 46 (☎28102 21609). All offer free delivery to hotels and the airport.

Buses See p.84 for locations of bus stations, and p.162 for destination details.

Festivals The Iráklion Summer Festival runs from July to mid-September. Held at the Teatro Níkos Kazantzákis at the Jesus Bastion, it includes exhibitions, concerts and plays by groups from around the world, some of which are top-notch: details and a free brochure listing all the events are available from the tourist office. August 25 (St Titus' Day) is marked by a major procession from the church of Áyios Títos.

Football OFI Crete is Iráklion's and Crete's major team playing in the Greek first division. Their matches take place at the Demótikou stadium, Platía Ayía Varvára in the Kaminia district on the west side of town (☎28102 83920). The city's other team, Ergotelis, play at the stadium below the Martinengo Bastion.

Hospitals The closest is the Venizélou Hospital, on the Knossós road south out of town (☎28103 68000). Others further out of town include the modern one at Voutes, Periferiako Panenistemiako Veniko Nosokomeio Irakleio (PAYNE; ☎28103 92111).

Internet There are numerous Internet cafés in and around the city centre. Central places include Netcafé, Odhós-1878 4 (ⓦwww.the-netcafe.net; daily 10am–2am), near the sea to the west of the Historical Museum; Gallery Games, Korai 14 (daily 10pm–5am) and Video Games, junction of Áyios Titos & Milatou (daily open 24hrs). See city map for locations.

Laundry Washsalon, Hándhakos 18 ⓣ28102 80858 (9am–9pm; €7 for 6kg) is reliable and will wash, dry and fold. Laundry Perfect, at the junction of Idoméneos and Malikoúti to the east of Áyios Títos church ⓣ28102 20969, is another good place (daily 9am–9pm; €5.80 for 6kg).

Left luggage There's a left luggage office in the eastbound and southwest bus stations (bus station A on city map; daily 5.30am–9pm; €1 per bag, per day) but not at the westbound one. Blue Sea, Kotzia 3 off Epimenidhou near the Venetian harbour (daily 7am–11pm), stores bags for €1 per day. There's also another commercial agency at Hándhakos 18 (daily 24hr; €1.50 per locker, per day). You can also leave bags at the youth hostel (see "Accommodation"), even if you don't stay there, for €2 per bag, per day. If you want to leave your bag while you go off on a bike for a day or two, the company from which you rent the bike should be prepared to store it.

Mountaineering The local EOS is at Dhikeosínis 53 ⓣ28102 27609.

Newspapers and books English-language and other foreign newspapers are sold throughout the city centre – the most central is Bibliopoleio, almost opposite the Morosini fountain on Platía Venizélou. The best selection of English-language titles, including a wide range of books and maps on Crete and Greece, is at the excellent Planet International Bookstore at Hándhakos 73 ⓣ28102 89605, near *The Mexican* restaurant (see "Eating"). Nearby, Road Editions, Hándhakos 29, also has a good selection of maps and books on Greek topics.

Pharmacies Plentiful on the main shopping streets. At least one will be open 24hrs on a rota basis; check the list on the door of any pharmacy for the nearest 24hr one. There are also traditional herbalists in the market.

Post office Main office in Platía Dhaskaloyiánnis, off Eleftherías (Mon–Fri 7.30am–8pm), with a temporary sub-office in summer in El Greco Park.

Taxis Major taxi stands are in Platía Eleftherías, Platía Kornarou and the bus station; or call ⓣ28102 10102 or ⓣ28102 10168. Prices displayed on boards at the taxi stands.

Toilets In El Greco Park and the Public Gardens and near the cathedral, at the bus stations and the Archeological Museum (no need to pay entrance charge to use them).

Travel agencies 25-Avgoústou is crammed with shipping and general travel agents. Discount/student specialists include the extremely helpful Blavakis Travel, Platía Kallergon 10, just off 25-Avgoústou by the entrance to El Greco Park (ⓣ28102 82541). Ferry tickets and information are also available from Paleologus Travel, 25-Avgoústou 5 ⓣ28103 46185, ⓦwww.ferries.gr; ⓦwww.greekislands.gr; Minoan Lines, 25-Avgoústou 78 ⓣ28102 29646, ⓦwww.minoan.gr; and Anek Lines, 25-Avgoústou 33 ⓣ28102 22481. For excursions around the island, villa rentals and so on, the bigger operators are probably easier: try Creta Travel Bureau, Dhikiosínis 49 (ⓣ28103 00610) or Hilouris Travel, 25-Avgoústou 76 (ⓣ28103 43400).

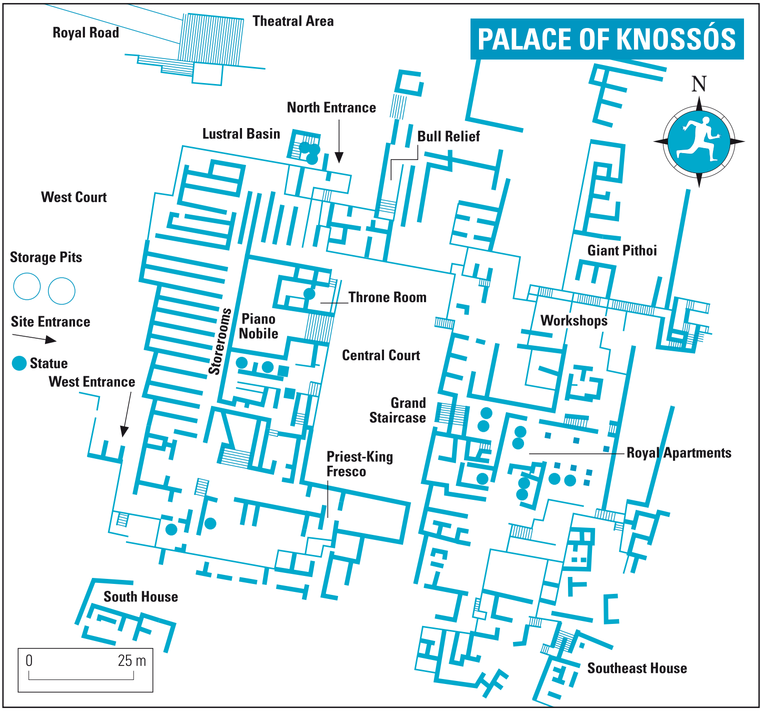
Knossós

. . . a dancing place
All full of turnings, that was like the admirable maze
For fair hair'd Ariadne made, by cunning Daedalus

Homer, *The Odyssey*

The archeological site of **KNOSSÓS** lies some 5km south of Iráklion on a low, largely artificial hill. By far the largest of the **Minoan palaces**, it thrived over three-and-a-half thousand years ago at the heart of a highly sophisticated island-wide civilization. Long after Minoan culture had collapsed, a town on this site remained powerful, rivalling Górtys well into the Roman era. Today it is perhaps the most famous – and most visited – of all Crete's tourist attractions.

And yet, not much more than a hundred years ago, Knossós was a place thought to have existed only in mythology. Here, legend has it that **King Minos** ruled


PALACE OF KNOSSÓS
N
Royal Road
Theatral Area
North Entrance
Lustral Basin
Bull Relief
West Court
Storage Pits
Site Entrance
Statue
West Entrance
Giant Pithoi
Throne Room
Workshops
Piano Nobile
Storerooms
Central Court
Grand Staircase
Priest-King Fresco
Royal Apartments
South House
Southeast House
0
25 m

and that his wife, Pasiphae, bore the **Minotaur** – a creature that was half-bull, half-man. On this site, the **labyrinth** was constructed by Daedalus to contain the monster, and youths were brought from Athens as human sacrifice, until finally **Theseus** arrived to slay the beast and, with Ariadne's help, escape its lair. Imprisoned in his own maze, Daedalus later constructed the wings that bore him away to safety – and his son **Icarus** to his untimely death.

The excavation of the palace, and the subsequent clothing of these legends with fact, is among the most amazing tales of modern archeology. Today's Knossós, whose fame rivals any such site in the world, is primarily associated with **Sir Arthur Evans**, who excavated the palace at the turn of the twentieth century and whose bust is one of the first things to greet you at the site. The autocratic control he exerted, his working standards and procedures, and, above all, the restorations he claimed were necessary to preserve the building have been a source of furious controversy among archeologists ever since. It has become clear that much of Evans's upper level, the *Piano Nobile*, is pure conjecture. Even so, his guess as to what the palace might have looked like is certainly as good as anyone else's, and it makes the other sites infinitely more meaningful if you have seen Knossós first. Without the restorations, it would be hard to visualize the ceremonial stairways, strange top-heavy pillars and brightly frescoed walls that distinguish Knossós – and almost impossible to imagine the grandeur of the multistorey palace. To get an idea of the size and complexity of the palace in its original state, take a look at the cutaway drawings on sale outside; they may seem somewhat fantastic, but are probably not too far from reality.

Practicalities and transport

The **site is open** in summer (April–Sept) daily from 8am to 7pm and in winter (Oct–March) daily from 8.30am to 3pm. Entry costs €6, or €10 for a joint ticket with the Iráklion Archeological Museum; under 18s and EU students are free. Getting to Knossós from Iráklion could hardly be easier. **Buses** #2 and #4 set out every ten minutes from the city bus stands adjacent to the eastbound bus station, then proceed up 25-Avgoústou (with a stop just below Platía Venizélou) and out of town on Odhós 1821 and Evans. If you're **driving**, you can take this route through Evans Gate, or follow the signs from Platía Eleftherías; from anywhere other than Iráklion, turn directly off the bypass onto the badly signed Knossós road. **Taxis** from the city cost about €7 to the site entrance.

No matter when you come, you won't get the place to yourself, but with luck you will have the opportunity to appreciate individual parts of the palace during the brief lulls between groups. In summer the best time of day to avoid the crowds is in the last couple of hours before closing time, which also has the advantage of being cooler. If you get the opportunity to come back a second time, it will all begin to make a great deal more sense.

On arrival, you're confronted first by a string of rather pricey tavernas and tacky souvenir stands. There are a couple of **rooms** places here too, and if you're really into Minoan culture there's a lot to be said for staying out this way to steal an early start. Be warned, though, that the site area is expensive and unashamedly commercial. At the end of all the development, on the left approaching from town and immediately by the site entrance, is the free official **car park** – although it tends to be inadequate at peak times. Beware of the numerous unofficial car parks on the last stretch of road before the site, where you'll be charged exorbitant amounts to park your vehicle. Arriving by scooter, you have the bonus of being able to park beneath the canopy at the entrance, a mere twenty metres from the ticket booth. This area is also where the bus drops you, and it's alongside the coach park that you **enter** the site proper, having first run the gauntlet of map salesmen and tour guides on the way to purchasing your ticket. To catch the bus back to Iráklion, you'll have to walk a short way back up the road.

The Palace

When you enter the **Palace of Knossós** through its West Court you soon discover how the legends of the labyrinth grew up around it. Even with a map and description, it can be very hard to work out where you are.

The remains you see are mostly those of the **second palace**, rebuilt after the destruction of around 1700 BC (see p.415) and occupied – with increasing Mycenaean influence – through to about 1450 BC. At the time, it was surrounded by a town of considerable size. The palace itself, though, must have looked almost as much of a mess then as it does now – a vast bulk, with more than a thousand rooms on five floors, which had spread across the hill more as an organic growth than a planned building, incorporating or burying earlier structures as it went. In this, the palace simply followed the pattern of Minoan architecture generally, with extra rooms being added as the need arose. It is a style of building still common on

The British School at Athens has a useful website (Ⓦ www.bsa.gla.ac.uk/knosos/) dedicated to Knossós with details on the history of the site and excavations, in addition to a virtual tour.

△ Píthoi, Knossós

Crete, where finished buildings seem to be outnumbered by those waiting to have an extra floor or room added when need and finance dictate.

The difficulty in understanding the site is not helped by the fact that you are no longer allowed to wander freely through the complex: instead, a series of **timber walkways** channels visitors around, severely restricting the scope for independent exploration. This is particularly true of the Royal Apartments, where access to many rooms is denied or reduced to partial views from behind glass screens. The walkways also make it almost impossible to avoid the guided tours that congregate at every point of significance en route. On the upside, wait anywhere long enough and a free commentary will come along – you can always tag onto one of these tours for a while, catch the patter and then hang back to take in the detail when the crowd has moved on.

The West Court and first frescoes

The **West Court**, across which you approach the palace, was perhaps a marketplace or, at any rate, the scene of public meetings. Across it run slightly raised walkways, leading from the palace's West Entrance to the Theatral Area, and once presumably on to the Royal Road. There are also three large **circular pits**, originally grain silos or perhaps depositories for sacred offerings, but used as rubbish tips by the end of the Minoan era. When these were excavated, remains of early dwellings – visible in the central pit, dating from around 2000 BC and thus preceding the first palace – were revealed. The walls and floor surfaces were found to have been coated with red plaster, and these are among the earliest-known remains on the site.

Following the walkway towards the West Entrance nowadays, you arrive at a typically muddled part of the palace, not at all easy to interpret. First, there's a line of stones marking the original wall of an earlier incarnation of the palace, then the facade of the palace proper, and beyond that a series of small rooms of which only the foundations survive. When the palace was standing, you would have passed through a guardroom and then followed the **Corridor of the Procession**, flanked by frescoes depicting a procession, around towards the south side of the palace; the walkway runs alongside. A brief detour down the stairway near the West Entrance would enable you to view the **South House** (see p.108) before entering the palace proper.

Following the walkway, you come to the reproduction of the **Priest-King Fresco** (which Evans dubbed the Prince of the Lilies, although some scholars are convinced the figure is female or not even a royal personage at all). A revealing glimpse into Evans's mindset comes from an article he wrote in the *London Times* when this fragmentary figure came to light: "…the head is wearing a crown, which terminates in a row of five sloping lilies… That the *fleur-de-lis* of our Edwards and Henrys should find a prototype in prehistoric Greece is a startling revelation". The nearby viewing point offers a chance to look down over the palace. Apparently, a whole series of large and airy frescoed chambers, perhaps reception rooms, once stood here.

The Central Court, Throne Room and Piano Nobile

Proceeding straight past the fresco, you enter the **Central Court**, the heart of the palace, aligned almost exactly north–south. The courtyard paving covers the oldest remains found on the site, dating back to Neolithic times. In Minoan times high walls would have hemmed the courtyard in on every side, and the atmosphere would have been very different from the open, shadeless space which survives. Some say this was the scene of the famous bull-leaping, but that seems unlikely: although the court measures almost 60m by 30m, it would hardly be spacious enough to accommodate the sort of intricate acrobatics shown in surviving pictures, let alone an audience to watch.

The entrance to one of Knossós's most atmospheric survivals, the **Throne Room**, is in the northwestern corner of the courtyard. Here, a worn stone throne sits against the wall of a surprisingly small chamber; along the walls around it are ranged stone benches and, behind, there's a copy of a fresco depicting two griffins. In all probability, this was the seat of a priestess rather than a ruler – there's nothing like it in any other Minoan palace – but it may just have been an innovation wrought by the Mycenaeans, since it appears that this room dates only from the final period of the palace's occupation. You'll spot the Throne Room by the queues to get in and press your face against the glass to view it. Opposite the throne, steps lead down to a lustral basin – a sunken "bath", probably for ritual purification rather than actual bathing, with no drain.

Alongside the Throne Room, a stairway climbs to the first floor and Evans's reconstructed **Piano Nobile**. One of the most interesting features of this part of the palace is the view it offers of the palace storerooms, with their rows of *píthoi* (storage jars). There's an amazing amount of storage space here, in the jars – which would mostly have held oil or wine – and in sections sunk into the ground for other goods. The rooms of the *Piano Nobile* itself are again rather confusing, though you should be able to pick out the Sanctuary Hall from stumps that remain of its six large columns. Opposite this is a small concrete room (complete with roof), which Evans "reconstructed" directly above the Throne Room. It feels entirely out of place; inside, there's a small display on the restoration of the frescoes, and through the other side you get another good view over the Central Court. Returning through this room, you could climb down the very narrow staircase on your right to arrive at the entrance to the corridor of storerooms (fenced off) or head back to the left towards the area where you entered the palace.

The Royal Apartments

Returning to the courtyard allows you to cross to the east side, where the Grand Staircase leads into the **Royal Apartments**, clearly the finest of the rooms at

Knossós. You can't go in to any of these rooms, but work has been going on to improve access and viewing, so you should at least be able to see them (which has not always been the case).

The **staircase** itself is an architectural masterpiece, not only a fitting approach to these sumptuously appointed chambers, but also an integral part of the whole design, its large well allowing light into the lower storeys. Light wells such as these, usually with a courtyard at the bottom, are a common feature of Knossós and a reminder of just how important creature comforts were to the Minoans, and how skilled they were at providing them.

For more evidence of this luxurious lifestyle, you need look no further than the **Queen's Suite**, off the grand **Hall of the Colonnades** at the bottom of the staircase. The main living room is decorated with the celebrated dolphin fresco and with running friezes of flowers and (earlier) spirals. On two sides it opens to courtyards that let in light and air; the smaller one would probably have been planted with flowers. It is easy to imagine the room in use, scattered with cushions and hung with rich drapes, curtains placed between the pillars providing privacy and cool shade in the heat of the day. Guides will describe all this but it is of course almost entirely speculation – and some of it pure con. The dolphin fresco, for example, was found in the courtyard, not the room itself, and would have been viewed from inside as a sort of *trompe l'oeil*, like looking out of a glass-bottomed boat. There are many who argue, convincingly, that grand as these rooms are, they are not really large or fine enough to have been royal quarters. Those would more likely have been in the lighter and airier rooms that must have existed in the upper reaches of the palace, while these lower apartments were inhabited by resident nobles or priests.

Whether or not you accept Evans's names and attributions, the rooms remain an impressive example of the sophistication of Minoan architecture. The **Queen's Bathroom**, its clay tub protected behind a low wall (and probably screened by curtains when in use), is another fine example, as is the famous "flushing" lavatory (a hole in the ground with drains to take the waste away – it was flushed by a bucket of water).

On the floor above the queen's domain, the Grand Staircase passes through a set of rooms which are generally described as the **King's Quarters**. These are chambers in a considerably sterner vein. The staircase opens into a grandiose reception area known as the **Hall of the Royal Guard**, its walls decorated in repeated shield motifs. Opening off it is the ruler's personal chamber, the **Hall of the Double Axes** – a room which could be divided to allow for privacy while audiences were held in the more public section, or the whole opened out for larger functions. Its name comes from the double-axe symbol, so common throughout Knossós, which here is carved into every block of masonry.

Plumbing and workshops

From the back of the queen's chambers, you can emerge into the fringes of the palace where it spreads down the lower slopes of the hill. This is a good point at which to consider the famous **drainage system** at Knossós, some of the most complete sections of which are visible under grilles. The snugly interconnecting terracotta pipes ran underneath most of the palace (here, they have come more or less direct from the Queen's Bathroom), and site guides never fail to point them out as evidence of the advanced state of Minoan civilization. Down by the external walls you get a clear view of the system of baffles and overflows designed to slow down the run-off and avoid flooding.

From the bottom of the slope, you get a fine impression of the scale of the whole palace complex and can circle around towards the north, climbing back inside the palace limits to see the area known as the **Palace Workshops**. Here, potters, lapidaries and smiths appear to have plied their trades, and this area is also home to the spectacular **giant píthoi**; people queue to have their photograph taken with the jars towering over them. There's also a good view of the bull-relief fresco set up by the north entrance.

Around the North Entrance

Circling around the palace, you can re-enter by the **North Entrance**. Beside the gateway is a well-preserved **lustral basin**, and beyond that, a guardroom. As you head up towards the central courtyard, a flight of stairs doubles back to allow you to examine the copy of the **Bull Relief** close up.

Just outside the North Entrance, the **Theatral Area** is one of the more important enigmas of this and other Minoan palaces. An open space resembling a stepped amphitheatre, it may have been used for ritual performances or dances, but there's no real evidence of this, and again there would have been very little room for an audience if that was its function.

Beyond it, the **Royal Road** sets out: originally this ran to the Little Palace (see below), and probably on across the island beyond that, but nowadays it ends after about 100m at a brick wall beneath the modern road. Alongside are assorted structures variously interpreted as stores, workshops or grandstands for viewing parades, all of them covered in undergrowth.

The south side

Of the lesser structures that crowd around the palace, a number of houses on the south side are particularly worth noting. The one known simply as the **South House**, reconstructed to its original three floors, seems amazingly modern, but actually dates from the late Minoan period (ca.1550 BC). The dwelling is believed to have belonged to an important official or noble, since it encroaches on the palace domain. In the **Southeast House** of the same period, a cult room with a sacred pillar was discovered, as well as stands for double axes and a libation table.

Outlying remains

Numerous small sites surround the palace, mostly barely visited, perhaps because unless you get lucky all you can do is stare in through their fences. Across a little valley from the south side of the Palace was the **Caravanserai**, where travellers would rest and water their animals; the restored building contains two elegant rooms, as well as a large stone footbath still with running water from an ancient spring. There's a good view of the Palace from the surrounding fields.

Among the other important outlying buildings are the **Little Palace**, on a site which also contains a mansion and many Roman remains (just up the narrow alley which veers off to the left as you head back towards Iráklion), and the **Royal Villa**, facing the palace from the slope to the northeast. Both are occasionally open for special visits.

About 100m along the road to Iráklion from the site entrance the **Villa Ariadne** lies amid lush gardens: this was built by Arthur Evans as his home-from-home during excavations. Later, the house served as a military hospital during the German siege of Iráklion and, following the city's fall, as the residence of the German commander of Crete. It was where General Kreipe was based when he was kidnapped (see p.427). The villa's dining room was also where the German army signed the surrender on May 9, 1945. Although it is not open to the public, nobody seems to mind if you walk up the drive past the gatehouse to have a look at the house's exterior and gardens.

Some two hundred metres further north along the same road lies the first-century **Villa Dionysos**, which lay near the centre of the Roman city of Cnossus. The villa has extremely fine polychrome mosaics, and once restoration work is complete it is planned to open it up to the public. Details on the progress of this should be available from the Knossós ticket office or the Iráklion tourist office.

South to Mount Yioúhtas

The countryside south of Knossós is dominated by the bulk of **Mount Yioúhtas** (811m), which rises alone from a landscape otherwise characterized by gently undulating agricultural country. Seen from the northwest, the mountain has an unmistakably human profile, and was traditionally identified with Zeus. The ancient Cretans claimed that Zeus lay buried underneath the mountain: given that the god is immortal, this furnished proof for other Greeks of the assertion that "All Cretans are liars" – it may even have been the original basis of this reputation.

Much of the interest in this region centres around Arhánes, where there's a fine **archeological museum** and easy access to three fascinating **Minoan sites** at Foúrni, Anemospília and on the summit of Mount **Yioúhtas** itself. Nearby at **Vathípetro** the remarkable remains of a Minoan vineyard can be seen, at the heart of what remains one of the island's chief **wine-growing areas**: at Pezá a couple of wine-makers open their doors to the public. **Houdétsi** has an interesting music school and museum displaying a wide variety of string and percussion instruments from all over the world, while the village of **Mirtiá** boasts a museum devoted to Crete's most famous literary name, **Níkos Kazantzákis**. Taken together, there's easily enough to fill a day's leisurely sightseeing.

Beyond Knossós, the nature of the journey south is transformed almost immediately: the road empties and the country becomes greener. Almost any of these roads makes a beautiful drive, past vineyards draped across low hills and through flourishing farming communities. Just a couple of kilometres from the archeological site, at the head of the valley, an extraordinary **aqueduct** arches along beside the road. This looks medieval and was built on the line of an earlier Roman aqueduct, but is in fact barely 150 years old, having been constructed during the brief period of Egyptian rule (1832–40) to provide Iráklion with water. It has now been taken over by a colony of noisy jackdaws. Just beyond the aqueduct are a couple of taverna/cafés beside the road – a convenient escape from the Knossós crowds.

Arhánes and around

The junction where you turn right towards Arhánes seems a singularly unthreatening spot today, yet it was here, on April 26, 1944, that General Kreipe was kidnapped (see p.427). The site is now marked by a lofty modern monument, but the information given on a plaque is in Greek only.

A short way along the Arhánes road you'll pass on the right the **Cretan Historical and Folklore Museum** (Wed–Mon 9.30am–3pm; €3), a private venture stuffed with a fascinating collection of artefacts from diverse periods in the island's history, all unusually well displayed and labelled. There's the usual collection of antique farming implements, pots and *raki* stills from Crete's agricultural past but also a section on World War II, which has photos of the occupation as well as personal effects belonging to General Kreipe, who ruled Crete from the German army's island command centre in Arhánes. Outside beneath a canopy is an assembly of guns and transport vehicles from the same period.

ARHÁNES itself is a large and prosperous agricultural centre, substantial enough to have a one-way traffic system and be served by hourly buses from Iráklion. A much-needed new bypass is being built, so some directions here may change, but in any event the streets are narrow and confusing, and the best advice for drivers is to park up near the square and explore on foot. There are several good tavernas and cafés around the main square, as well as numerous flashy modern bars, reflecting the region's agricultural prosperity.

Arhánes was a significant centre of **Minoan civilization**, and there are a number of sites round about. All of them are relatively recent discoveries, having been excavated over the last few decades, and not all of the excavations have been fully published. Consequently, these sites are neither particularly famous nor especially welcoming to visitors, but many of the finds are nonetheless important. The largest of the structures is the **Palace**, in reality more likely a large villa, which lies right in the heart of modern Arhánes, signed just off the main road. Through the chain-link fence you can see evidence of a substantial walled mansion, representing only a small part of what once stood here. Piecemeal excavation is still going on at other sites in the centre too, but much is hidden beneath more modern buildings. If you make the Archeological Museum your first stop, you can find out more about the status of these sites, and get directions to others in the surrounding area.

Arhánes Archeological Museum

To find the **Archeological Museum** (Wed–Mon 8.30am–2.30pm; free), follow the one-way street north from the main square for about 100m; the museum is signed up a narrow street on the left.

Imaginatively laid out in a single room, the museum displays finds from the town and surrounding sites. Near the entrance are some well-preserved Minoan **larnakes** (clay coffins) from **Foúrni** (see opposite) dating from around 1800 BC, and also from the cemetery at Foúrni is a **sistrum** (a simple, tambourine-like musical instrument) dating from around 2000 BC: it may well be the oldest surviving musical instrument in Europe. There's a photo nearby of the famous "Harvesters Vase" from the Iráklion museum, depicting a *sistrum* in use.

There are fascinating finds, too, from **Anemospília** (see opposite), where human sacrifices appear to have taken place in the temple. A copy of the **dagger** found lying on the sacrificial victim is displayed here (the original is in the Iráklion museum), with a curious motif of a hybrid animal – resembling a deformed boar – carved on the blade. There's also a copy of the seal stone (also in Iráklion) which the priest was wearing on his left wrist as well as the terracotta feet of a wooden statue which was destroyed in the fire that followed the destruction of the temple.

Other items to look out for include small terracotta cups which contained the ochres used to paint frescoes on the walls in the palaces and villas, and an imaginative display of **pottery shards** that evidences five thousand years of human occupation in this town: crude works of the third millennium BC are succeeded by the various Minoan periods, then Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Turkish pieces, down to broken pots of the present day. There are also fragments of Minoan wall painting which underline their mastery of this medium and convey some idea of how brilliant the colours must have been when newly painted.

Icons and churches

This is an old town, and there are numerous ancient churches scattered through it. Right on the main square an incongruous whitewashed clocktower marks out one, with a fine collection of icons; elsewhere, there are Byzantine frescoes in the church of Ayía Triádha on the fringes of town and, much more importantly, at the church of **Asómatos** to the east, where the superb fourteenth-century works include a horrific *Crucifixion* and a depiction of the fall of Jericho with Joshua in full medieval armour. Call at the archeological museum first, to pick up the key and directions, as well as advice on others to seek out.

Foúrni

Foúrni (Tues–Sun 8.30am–2.30pm; free) lies immediately to the west of town, across the bypass and then about ten minutes' walk up a steep, very rocky trail. The size of the site is evidence of the scale of the Minoan community that once thrived around Arhánes; what has been unearthed here is a **burial ground** used throughout the Minoan period, with its earliest tombs dating from around 2500 BC (before the construction of the great palaces), and the latest from the very end of the Minoan era. The structures include a number of early tholos tombs – round, stone buildings reminiscent of beehives – each of which contained multiple burials in sarcophagi and *píthoi*. Since many simpler graves and a circle of seven Mycenaean-style shaft graves were also revealed at Foúrni, it is by far the most extensive Minoan cemetery known. Its significance was increased by some of the finds made here – most importantly within "Tholos A", where a side-chamber was found that revealed the undisturbed tomb of a woman who, judging by the jewellery and other goods buried with her, was of royal descent and perhaps a priestess. Her jewellery is now on display at the Iráklion Archeological Museum, as is the skeleton of a horse apparently sacrificed in her honour.

Anemospília

Anemospília, 2km northwest of Arhánes, is enlivened by a spectacular setting and a controversial story, though the site itself can only be viewed through a fence. The approach road heads north from Arhánes: coming from Iráklion, you enter the one-way street and almost immediately turn sharp right, back on yourself, just past a small chapel. Following the road leading northwest out of the town, you begin to climb across the northern face of Mount Yioúhtas, winding around craggy rocks weirdly carved by the wind (Anemospília means "Caves of the Wind") until you reach the fenced site held in a steep curve of the road.

What stood here was a **temple**, and its interpretation has been the source of outraged controversy among Minoan scholars since its excavation at the beginning of the 1980s. The building is a simple one, consisting of three rooms connected by a north-facing portico, but its contents are not so easily described. The temple was apparently destroyed by an earthquake, which struck during a ceremony that appears to have involved **human sacrifice** – the only evidence of such a ritual found in Minoan Crete. This came as a severe shock to those who liked to portray the Minoans as the perfect peaceable society, but the evidence is hard to refute. Three skeletons were found in the western room: one had rich jewellery, indicative of a priest; another was a woman, presumably a priestess or assistant; the third was curled up on an altar-like structure, and, according to scientists, was already dead when the building collapsed and killed the others. A large bronze knife lay on top of this third skeleton. Outside the western room, another man was crushed in the corridor, apparently carrying some kind of ritual vase. These events have been dated to around 1700 BC, roughly the time of the earthquakes that destroyed the first palaces and, in the circumstances, it seems easy to believe that the priests might have resorted to desperate measures in a final attempt to appease the gods who were destroying their civilization.

The summit of Mount Yioúhtas and Vathípetro

Continuing beyond Arhánes you'll see a sign after a couple of kilometres for the summit of **Mount Yioúhtas**, up a track which is a relatively easy drive. You can also climb to the top in little over an hour from Arhánes, but it seems rather unsatisfying to do this only to discover other people rolling up on their motorbikes or in taxis (the path is part of the E4 European path as it crosses Crete: coming from the east it follows the track mentioned above, while the westward extension winds steeply down to Arhánes). At the summit, the **panoramic views** are the main lure, back across Iráklion especially, but also west to Psiloritís and east to Dhíkti. Up here, too, is a small chapel, and the trappings of the annual *paniyíri* (festival), which is celebrated on August 15 and attracts villagers from all around. The impressive remains of a **Minoan Peak sanctuary** dating from the early second millennium BC occupy the north side of the hill, partly built over by a telecommunications relay station. It very likely served as a cult centre, attracting pilgrims from Arhánes and Knossós, both of which can be seen from the summit. An enormous number of votive offerings, including jewellery, figurines and libation vessels, were unearthed in the excavations and are now on display in the museum at Iráklion. On the shoulders of the mountain, not easily accessible, are caves associated with the local Zeus cult.

The main road running beneath Mount Yioúhtas continues south toward **Vathípetro**, which is well signposted along the way. Here, at last, is a site which can be examined close up: a large **Minoan villa** (Tues–Sun 8am–2.30pm; free), which once controlled the rich farmland south of Arhánes. Inside, a remarkable collection of everyday items was found – equipment for making wine and oil, and other tools and simple requisites of rural life. Still surrounded by a vineyard with a valid claim to be the oldest in the world (winemaking has been carried on here since the second millennium BC), the house was originally a substantial building of several storeys, with a courtyard enclosing a shrine, and fine large rooms – especially on the east. The basement workrooms, however, were the scene of the most interesting discoveries, comprising agricultural equipment and a remarkably well-preserved **winepress**, which can still be seen in situ.

Houdétsi and Pezá

South of Vathípetro, the road soon rejoins a more major route: continue south here and you can cut right across the island to the Messará plain (p.156), but turn back towards Iráklion and you almost immediately enter Houdétsi. **Houdétsi** is distinguished from its agricultural neighbours by the presence of **Labyrinth** (March–Oct daily 8am–4pm, Nov–Feb Sun 10am–3pm; €3; ☎2810 741027, Ⓦwww.labyrinthmusic.gr) – partly a **museum of musical instruments** from all around the world and partly a music workshop with a programme of concerts and seminars throughout the summer. Housed in an elegant mansion, with a rare, emerald-green grass lawn, Labyrinth was founded by Irish *lyra* player Ross Daly (see box opposite), who lives in the village, and is the focus for much of his musical energy. The museum consists of a collection of mainly string and percussion instruments (many very rare) from across the globe. To find it, head for *Bar Paranga*, on the main road by the central square – the museum lies opposite. Around the square are a couple of small tavernas, and there always seem to be musicians hanging out here, and occasional impromptu performances; there's even a rather elegant place to stay, *Petronikoli Traditional House*, which is indeed a traditional house, nicely converted into a couple of studios and a larger two-bedroom apartment (☎2810 743203/6973 039641; ④).

△ *Lyra* player

Heading back towards Knossós and Iráklion you pass through **Pezá**, the main centre of the province's wine production. There are a couple of places here that offer tasting and "wine museums", though in practice the latter are little more than glorified souvenir shops. The biggest of them is **Minos** (April–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat 9am–1pm; Ⓦ www.minoswines.gr Ⓣ 2810 741595), on the main street, whose various wines are the top sellers on the island. If you're lucky you may coincide with a tour of the wine-making plant, but at any time you can watch

The Irish lyra player

One of the more remarkable stories of Cretan music is that an Irishman, **Ross Daly**, has become one of its most famous names. Born in England of Irish parents, he grew up in Asia and North America, the family settling wherever the work of his physicist father happened to take them. Daly first visited Crete in 1971 and was strongly attracted to its traditional music, studying in that same decade under master *lyra* player Kostas Mountakis, in Haniá. Part of his early career was spent in Anóyia teaching *lyra* to local children, but once he had become a *lyra* virtuoso he was not content to stay within the confines of Cretan music and began to synthesize what he had learned in Crete and Greece with music from other cultures such as Turkey, the Balkans, India and Afghanistan.

Daly now performs worldwide with his ensemble, Labyrinth, a unit comprising Russian, Greek and Cretan musicians, but always returns to his home in Crete. In addition to the *lyra*, he now plays a variety of instruments, including the *laouto* (lute), *oud*, *rabab* (Afghan lute), *sarangi* (Turkish *bouzouki*) and a special *lyra* with twenty-one strings instead of the usual three. More details, including a full discography, can be found on his website Ⓦ www.rossdalymusic.com.

a video about the history of wine production on the island, look at some traditional wine-making equipment, and taste and buy the house brands.

Mirtiá

The main reason to visit **MIRTIÁ** is for the Kazantzákis Museum in the village: only the seriously committed will spend long here, but it's a lovely drive there on almost deserted roads. Mirtiá itself is larger than you'd expect – as are so many of these villages – and bright with flowers planted in old olive-oil cans. On the central *platía*, well beyond the multicoloured, multilingual signs at either end of the village, is the **Kazantzákis Museum** (March–Oct daily 9am–7pm; Nov–Feb Sun only 10am–3pm; €3). Occupying a fine bourgeois mansion where Kazantzákis's parents once lived, the collection includes a vast quantity of ephemera relating to the great author: diaries, photos, manuscripts, first editions, translations into every conceivable language, playbills, stills from films of his works, costumes and more. There's also a video documentary in Greek. A couple of simple *kafenía* in the village offer drinks.

West of Iráklion

Heading west from Iráklion, the modern **E75 highway**, cut into the cliffs, is – in daytime at any rate – as fast and efficient a road as you could hope to find (see box opposite). In simple scenic terms it's a spectacular drive, but with very little in the way of habitation; there are only a couple of developed beach resorts

Níkos Kazantzákis

Níkos Kazantzákis was born in Iráklion in 1883 in the street now named after him. His early life was shadowed by the struggle against the Turks and for union with Greece. Educated in Athens and Paris, Kazantzákis travelled widely throughout his life, working for the Greek government on more than one occasion (serving briefly as minister for education in 1945) and for UNESCO, but above all writing. He produced a vast range of works, including philosophical essays, epic poetry, travel books, translations of classics such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* into Greek and, of course, the novels on which his fame in the West mostly rests. **Zorba the Greek** (1946) was his first and most celebrated novel, but his output remained prolific to the end of his life. Particularly relevant to Cretan travels are *Freedom or Death* (1950), set amid the struggle against the Turks, and the autobiographical *Report to Greco*, published posthumously in 1961 (Kazantzákis died in Freiburg, West Germany, in 1957 after contracting hepatitis from an unsterilized vaccination needle during a visit to China).

Kazantzákis is widely accepted as the leading Greek writer of the twentieth century, and Cretans are extremely proud of him, despite the fact that most of his later life was spent abroad, that he was banned from entering Greece for long periods, and that he was excommunicated by the Orthodox Church for his vigorously expressed doubts about Christianity. This last detail gained him more recent notoriety when his *The Last Temptation of Christ* was filmed by Martin Scorsese, amid much controversy. The church was also instrumental in working behind the scenes to deny him the Nobel Prize, which he lost by one vote to Albert Camus in 1957. Many critics now regard his writing as overblown and pretentious, but even they admit that the best parts are where the Cretan in Kazantzákis shows through, in the tremendous gusto and vitality of books like *Zorba* and *Freedom or Death*. Kazantzákis himself was always conscious, and proud, of his Cretan heritage.

The E75 highway

The **E75 highway** which crosses the north of the island, linking Haniá in the west to Sitía in the east, is one of the most **dangerous** in Greece. The fact that it is a two-lane road with a hard shoulder has not prevented the exotic Greek driving style from turning it into an unofficial four-lane highway: slow-movers are expected to straddle the line demarcating the hard shoulder, thus allowing faster cars to overtake at will. A reluctance by some tourists to follow this unwritten rule often leads to dangerous tailgating by locals until the way is cleared for the driver in a hurry. Other hazards on this road are posed by small or badly positioned **signs**, frequently posted far too late. Missing your exit can mean travelling a considerable distance to the next one, as they are not as frequent as you might expect. Further dangers can include unexpected traffic lights where the highway passes close to a town, and **left turns**, which can be particularly scary at night when you must deal with the dual hazards of crossing the opposite lane of traffic and the possibility of someone ploughing into your rear whilst you're waiting to do so.

and the "birthplace of El Greco" at **Fódhele** until the final, flat stretch before Réthimnon.

If you're in no hurry, forget the highway and try the older roads west, curling up amid stunning mountain scenery. The only sight of real significance on these back roads is the Minoan settlement at **Tílissos**, but they have the advantage of taking you through archetypal rural Crete, with tracks tramped by herds of sheep and goats, isolated chapels or farmsteads beside the road, and occasionally a village.

Along the E75 highway

Once past the western city beaches, the highway starts to climb into the foothills of the Psiloritis range as they plunge straight to the sea. As you ascend, keep an eye out for the immaculately crafted medieval fortress of **Paleókastro**, built into the cliff right beside the road; it's easy to miss, so completely do the crumbling fortifications blend in against the rocks. Just beyond, the road crosses a bridge over the modern village of Paleókastro, nestling in a little gully which leads down to the sea: a beautiful setting, with wealthy suburban homes and restaurants popular for weekend outings.

Ayía Pelayía

As you round the headland, **AYÍA PELAYÍA** is laid out below, a sprinkling of white cubes around a deep blue bay, unbelievably inviting from this distance. Closer up, the attraction is slightly diminished: development is rapidly outpacing the capacity of the narrow, taverna-lined beach and is beginning to take its toll on the village. However, the water is clear and calm, the swimming excellent and there's a superb view, too, of all the ships that pass the end of the bay as they steam into Iráklion – spectacular at night, when the brightly lit ferries go by. Despite the development, and although the beach can get very crowded with day-trippers from Iráklion at weekends, Ayía Pelayía retains a slightly exclusive feel, partly thanks to a couple of fine, upmarket hotels on the promontory immediately beyond the village. Water-skiing, parasailing and motorboats are all available on the beach.

The **practicalities** are fairly straightforward. As it descends towards the resort (past numerous rooms places), the road splits. The right-hand fork leads to a car park at the southern end of the beach; the other winds round to enter the town from the back. Follow the latter right down to the beach – by the second Supermarket Vassilis – and you'll find numerous decent accommodation options. There are five direct **buses** a day from Iráklion (fewer on Sundays), departing from Platía Eleftherías, outside the *Astoria* hotel. If you take a long-distance bus from Iráklion that is bound for Réthimnon or Haniá, you face a steep three-kilometre walk down from the drop-off point on the highway.

Accommodation is plentiful, much of it in studios or apartments with cooking facilities, rather than straightforward rooms. Out of season, these can be excellent value if you're prepared to bargain, but through the summer they're mostly block-booked. If you do want to stay, it's a question of wandering around asking at every door with a sign – the owners will usually know who (if anyone) has a room free. You'll see plenty along the road as you come into town: right down at the end of the road near the beach good options include *Zorba's Apartments* (Ⓣ2810 811074, Ⓦwww.zorbas.gr; ④) and *Irini* (Ⓣ2810 811455; Ⓔinfo@irini-hotel-apartments.gr; ③), both with well-equipped studios and apartments with air conditioning and cooking facilities. Slightly further up the road are two places with pools: *Renia* (Ⓣ2810 811349; Ⓦwww.renia.gr; ④), as you enter the village, has modern apartments for up to five people, while the exceptionally friendly *Creta Sun Hotel* (Ⓣ28108 11636; ⑤), on the road behind the village, has pleasant studio rooms with balcony. *Marina* (Ⓣ6942453609; ②) is a rather more basic, old-fashioned rooms place just behind the southern end of the beach near the car park. At the opposite end of the spectrum the *Capsis Beach* (Ⓣ2810 811112, Ⓦwww.capsis.gr; ⑨), on a promontory overlooking the town, is the finest of several luxury hotels around the bay. Should you be having trouble you can get help with finding a room, as well as car rental and other travel agency services, at *JK Tours* (Ⓣ2810 811400), on the next street parallel to the main road down to the beach, to the north.

For **food**, it's hard to look past the obvious attractions of the seafront tavernas, though you pay for the setting and none are exceptional. Among the more reliable are *To Votsalo* (Ⓣ2810 811022), good value, with well-cooked fish, and *Caldera* (Ⓣ2810 811944), a more modern, stylish option, both towards the northern end of the beach. *Cochili,* at the south end of the seafront, is another safe choice for standard taverna fare. There are plenty of cheaper options in the village, including a number of takeaways and small supermarkets for the makings of a picnic on the beach. There's **Internet** access at *Worldc@fe*, opposite *Irini* apartments, and plenty of low-key **nightlife**, mostly based at numerous waterfront bars.

If you feel in need of a little more space, there are several other small **beaches** nearby. Continuing out of the far end of Ayía Pelayía you can walk to three small coves on the coast as it curls around to the north and west: Kladhisos, Psaromoura (with a summertime bar) and finally Mononaftis. In the other direction, **Ligariá,** to the east, has a little harbour and a number of tavernas – most of the time it's very quiet, but summer weekends can get busy. There are a couple of rooms places here – a good choice are the simple rooms right above the beach at the *Taverna Lygaria* (Ⓣ2810 811242; ②) – and also an excellent **scuba** centre in the shape of the European Diving Institute (Ⓣ2810 811252, Ⓦwww.eurodiving.gr). There's a turning off the E75 signed directly to Ligariá, or a signed road off the road down into Ayía Pelayía.

Fódhele

FÓDHELE is firmly established on the tourist circuit as the birthplace of the painter **El Greco** (1541–1614), although there's virtually no hard evidence to substantiate the claim and most experts now believe that he was born in Iráklion. Nonetheless the excursion is a pleasant one: Fódhele is a lovely village in a richly fertile, peaceful valley, surrounded by orange and lime groves. On the far side of the river as you drive up are a couple of small Byzantine chapels, and there's an ancient church in the village. Despite the craft and souvenir shops that line the main street, selling local embroidery, and the café tables ranged along the river bank, Fódhele most of the time is almost preternaturally sleepy – you can sit at one of the shady café tables for half an hour before anyone emerges to take your order, and wait as long again before your refreshment appears. Meanwhile, take a few minutes to study the plaque in the village square, made of stone from Toledo (where Domenico Theotokópoulos settled, produced the bulk of his most famous works and earned the name El Greco). The plaque was presented to Fódhele in 1934 by the University of Valladolid as an authentication of the locale's claim to fame, which must be responsible in some measure for its current prosperity, whatever the scholars may say.

To get to the **Museum of El Greco** (May–Oct Tues–Sun 9am–5pm; €5) follow the signs in the village, across the bridge and up a track above the valley for about one kilometre. They used to claim that this was the house where the artist was born: without that excuse the museum is, frankly, a shameless rip-off, with a few very poor reproductions of El Greco's work and almost nothing about his life and times or how the works were created.

It is a pleasant spot, though, and directly opposite is the charming, mainly fourteenth-century **church of the Panayía** (usually locked). This exquisite, drum-domed church was built over an eighth-century basilica – should you get inside, the central nave and the baptismal font in the floor beside the church (deep enough for total immersion) you can see that date from the earlier building. There are also restored thirteenth- and fourteenth-century frescoes. Beneath the orange groves surrounding the church are the remains of the medieval village it once served.

Just two **buses** a day run direct to Fódhele from the Pórta Haníon (Haniá Gate) terminal in Iráklion, but the timings aren't really conducive to a quick visit. On the other hand, it's not too far to walk back to the highway junction 3km away, so you could catch the direct afternoon bus up (currently 3pm; Mon–Fri only) and then try flagging down a long-distance bus on the main road. There are also occasional **tours** from Iráklion. For drivers the turning is clearly signed off the E75 or you can cut across from Ayía Pelayía on an old stretch of paved road via the hilltop village of Ahládha.

West on the old roads

Ignoring the benefits of the modern coastal highway and taking the older mountain route is far slower, but the experience of travelling through traditional Cretan countryside is a definite bonus. Once under the raised highway, you immediately start to climb south into the hills. Almost straightaway, there's a right turn signed to **Rodhiá**, a sizeable village looking back down over the city. A couple of *kafenía* here allow you to rest up and enjoy the views.

From Rodhiá, a signed detour climbs 5km northwest on narrow tracks to the isolated **convent of Savathianá** (daily 8am–1pm & 4–8pm). Set amid barren mountain-tops, it's an extraordinary place, a lush oasis filled with flowers and birdsong, redolent of a more tranquil age. Founded in the Venetian period, the settlement is beautifully kept by its diligent nuns, who cultivate fruit trees above all and sell homemade jams to visitors. There are three small chapels within the complex, which gained further celebrity in 1991 when an eighteenth-century icon entitled *Lord Thou Art Great*, identical to the one at Tóplou (see p.203), was discovered; both were painted by Ioánnis Kornáros.

If you choose not to take the turning to Rodhiá, continuing southwest along the road signed for Márathos and Tílissos soon brings you to **Arolíthos**, a tacky, artificial "traditional village" aimed squarely at tourists. There are craft workers

– potters, weavers, artists, a smith – who use traditional methods, stores where you can buy their products, a half-hearted “museum”, and a restaurant with events such as Greek dancing evenings. There are also some comfortable rooms (Ⓣ2810 821050, Ⓦwww.arolithosvillage.gr; ❺), peaceful at night, though no very good reason to stay.

A little way beyond Arolíthos, the way divides: the road that used to be the main route from Iráklion to Réthimnon is the one that runs through **Márathos**, 9km northwest of Arolíthos. Famous for the honey that seems to be on sale at every house, Márathos is an attractive place with a couple of *kafenía* in case you feel like breaking the journey (this road runs through very few other villages of any size). Not far beyond the village, it’s possible to cut down by unpaved but reasonable track to Fódhele.

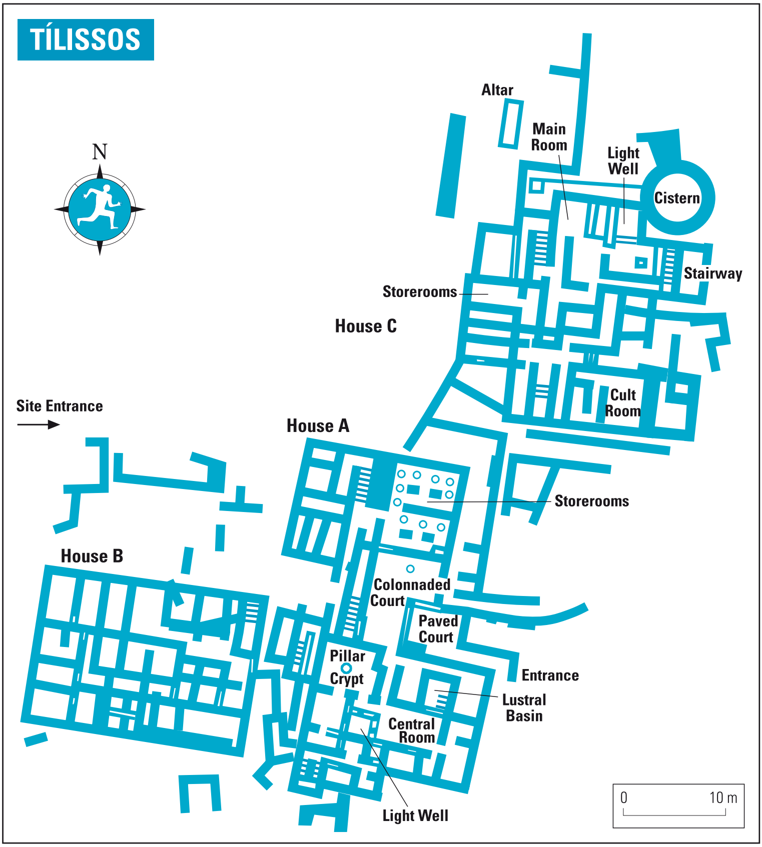
These days, more people seem to travel by the further inland of the roads, the one that climbs southwest through Tílissos and on via **Anóyia** (p.262). It’s a pleasant ride through the Malevísi, a district of fertile valleys filled with olive groves and vineyards renowned from Venetian times for the strong, sweet **Malmsey wine** much favoured in western Europe. England became a major market for the wine, and the growth of the shipping trade between Candia (Iráklion) and English ports caused King Henry VIII to appoint the first-ever British consul to the island in 1522.

Tílissos

The big attraction of the first part of the trip along this inland route is **TÍLISSOS**, 12km southwest of Iráklion. Tílissos is a name famous in the annals of Minoan archeology as one of the first sites to be excavated, and the thriving modern village has a fair claim to 4000 years of continuous human occupation. Local archeologist Hatzidákis, working at the beginning of the twentieth century, revealed evidence of structures from the early Pre-Palace period (ca. 2000 BC), but interest focuses primarily on three large villas (known as Houses A, B and C) from the **New Palace** era, contemporary with the great periods at Knossós, Festós and elsewhere. They were probably not as isolated in the country-house sense as they seem today, but may well have been part of a thriving community, or even a staging post on the route west towards as yet undiscovered centres. The existence of a rather simpler villa at Sklavókambos, on the road halfway from here to Anóyia, may lend weight to this latter theory. Tílissos shared in the destruction of the palaces in about 1450 BC, but new buildings then arose, amongst which was the cistern in the northeast corner. Following the arrival of the Dorians, Tílissos developed into a Greek city of the Classical period, issuing its own coinage. This later construction tends to make it a bit harder to get a clear picture of what’s there today.

The **archeological site** (daily 8.30am–3pm; €2) is signed to the left off the main street of the modern village. While it’s not always the easiest of sites to interpret, it is a lovely place to wander round, with few visitors, pine trees for shade, and some evocative remains, including staircases and walls still standing almost two metres tall. Immediately beyond the fence, vineyards and rich agricultural land suggest a seductive, but probably illusory, continuity of rural life.

Houses A and C are of extremely fine construction and design (C is the more impressive), while little remains of House B apart from its ground plan, although it does contain some of the oldest relics here. A building of finely dressed ashlar stone, **House A** has a **colonnaded court** at its heart with a window lighting the staircase to the west side of this. In storerooms on the north side, some large reconstructed *píthoi* can be seen with holes near their bases for tapping the contents (probably oil). A number of Linear A tablets also came to light in this area.


TÍLISSOS
N
Altar
Main Room
Light Well
Cistern
Stairway
Storerooms
House C
Cult Room
Site Entrance
House A
Storerooms
House B
Colonnaded Court
Paved Court
Pillar Crypt
Entrance
Lustral Basin
Central Room
Light Well
0
10 m

In the south wing, the main rooms open onto a light well, with the central room having a **lustral basin** – in this case more like a sunken bath – just off it. A stand for a double axe, similar to finds from Knossós, was found in the **pillar crypt**, along with the three enormous bronze cauldrons (now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum) that originally prompted the site's excavation. Throughout the house, fragments of painted stucco were found, leading archeologists to postulate the existence of a luxurious second storey to this dwelling, which had fallen in over time.

House C, with a fair amount of concrete reconstruction, contains a **cult room** with a central pillar, storerooms and, at its northern end, the living area, where a paved main room would have been illuminated by a light well on its eastern side. At the end of one of many corridors (a Minoan speciality), a staircase would once have led to an upper floor. There is also evidence of a drainage system, while outside the house, beside the cistern, is a **stone altar** from the Classical period.

Buses run four times a day to the modern village of Tílissos from the Pórta Haníon in Iráklion, and continue towards Anóyia. At the top end of the village on the main street, there are several cafés and tavernas.

East of Iráklion

East of the city beach at Amnísos there's almost continuous development all the way to Mália, as what little remains of the coastal landscape is torn apart to build yet more hotels, apartments and beach complexes flanking the E75 highway; should you want to access any of the places en route, you'll need to turn off onto the old road.

You're in package-tour country here and the resorts of **Hersónisos** and **Mália** are big, brash and packed with visitors all summer long. Welcome relief from the coastal hullabaloo is provided by the **Skotino Cave** near Goúves, and the superb **Minoan palace** east of Mália, which should not be missed.

Háni Kokkíni and around: the Skotinó cave

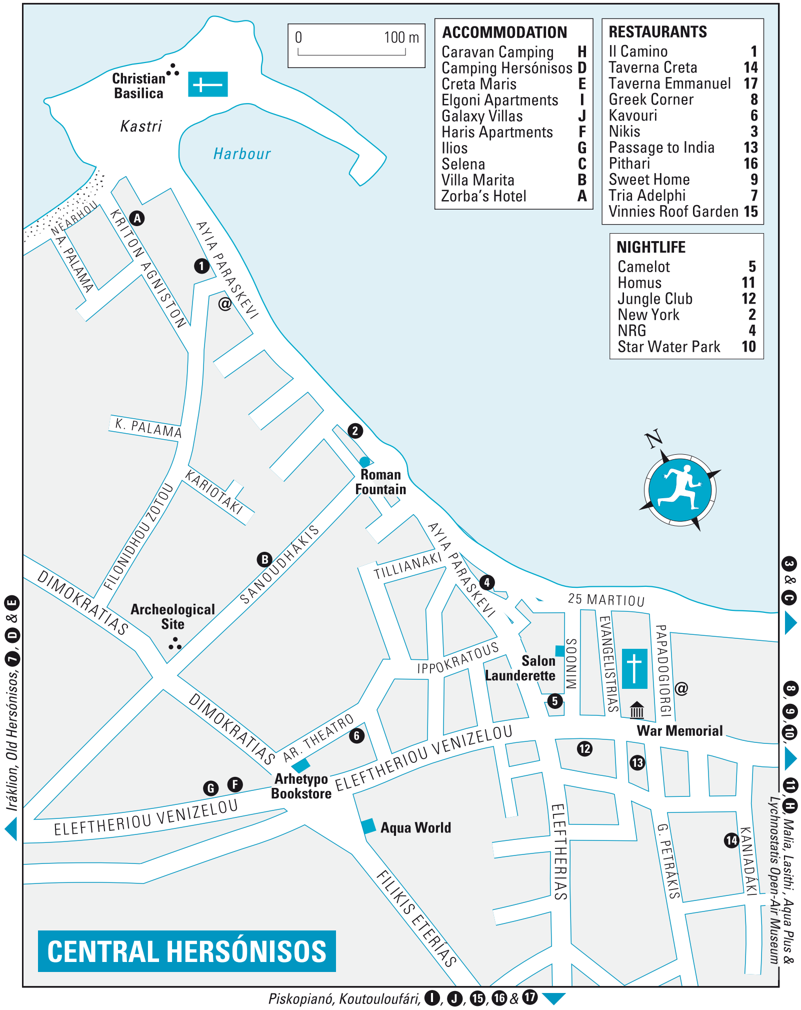
The first distinct centre east of Iráklion is **Háni Kokkíni**, a grubbily nondescript resort with a long but rather pebbly beach. There's a **Minoan villa** here (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; free) – known as Nírou Háni – which must have been beautifully sited when it stood alone. With the road immediately outside and traffic roaring by, however, it is harder to appreciate; it has also been closed for restoration recently. On through **Goúrnes** there's no break in the narrow, overdeveloped coastal strip apart from where, just west of the village, a mammoth former US air force base awaits redevelopment. One thing that has been built here, and currently stands surrounded by broken fences and crumbling runways, is **Cretaquarium** (open daily May–Oct 9am–9pm, Nov–April 10am–5.30pm, adults €8, children 5–17 €6; Ⓣ2810 337788, Ⓦwww.cretaquarium.gr). With some 200 species of Mediterranean sealife in its vast glass tanks – everything from seahorses to sharks – it's pretty impressive. Cretaquarium is well signed off the highway as, inland, is the giant **Water City waterpark** (open daily May–Oct 10am–6.30pm, adults €17, children 4–12 €14, half-day €14/€8; Ⓣ2810 781317) at Anópoli, the largest and probably the most impressive on the island.

Adjacent to the far side of the old airbase, on the edge of **Káto Goúves**, is the nearest campsite to the capital, *Camping Creta* (Ⓣ28970 41400), a surprisingly quiet and pleasant spot, right on the beach. About 6km inland from Káto Goúves the **Skotinó Cave** (free) is one of the largest and most spectacular on the island. It's a pleasant 45-minute walk (or short drive) from the coast, passing through **Goúves** village, which makes an encouragingly complete contrast to the coastal strip and is a good stop to pick up refreshments – there are a couple of decent **tavernas**. The village of **Skotinó** (which means "dark") is signed off the road a kilometre or so beyond Goúves, or if you're walking, ask for directions along 3km of unsigned tracks. Approaching Skotinó village you'll see a sign for the "Cave of Ayía Paraskeví"; this road eventually degenerates into a track, and the cave entrance is a further kilometre, below a whitewashed chapel which you will see on the horizon.

The cave is 160m deep and is divided into four levels, with an awesomely huge main chamber. It was first investigated by Evans and more scientifically explored in the 1960s by French and Greek archeologists. A considerable number of bronze and ceramic **votive offerings** were found here (the earliest dating back to early Minoan times), suggesting that this was an important sacred shrine. The cave remained in use well into the Greek and Roman eras, when the fertility goddess Artemis was worshipped in what is thought to have been a substitution for an earlier Minoan female fertility deity, possibly Brytomartis. In the chapel of Ayía Paraskeví above, *taxímata* (ex votos) left by pilgrims continue a tradition of supplication to the (now Christian) deity which has persisted on this same spot for well over four thousand years.

Hersónisos and around

Continuing east, the old road winds on along the coast, while the highway cuts through the hills inland to a major junction where you can turn right for the **Lasíthi Plateau** (see p.170), or left to roll down into the first of the really big resorts, **HERSÓNISOS** (or, more correctly, Límin Hersonísou, the Port of Hersónisos; Hersónisos is one of the villages in the hills just behind). A brash, sprawling and rather seedy resort catering to mainly Dutch, Irish and Italian package tourists, Hersónisos is replete with all the trappings of mass tourism. If you're looking for tranquility and Cretan tradition, forget it; this is the world of concrete high-rise hotels, video bars, fast-food shops and Eurodisco nightlife. The town's main artery is a two-kilometre street (Odhós Elefthériou Venizélou) parallel to the


0
100 m
Christian Basilica
Kastri
Harbour
NEARHOU
A. PALAMA
KRITON AGNISTON
AYIA PARASKEVI
K. PALAMA
KARIOTAKI
FILONIDHOU ZOTOU
Roman Fountain
SANOUDHAKIS
TILLIANAKI
Archeological Site
DIMOKRATIAS
IPPOKRATOUS
Salon Launderette
25 MARTIOU
MINOOS
EVANGELISTRIAS
PAPADOGIORGI
War Memorial
AR. THEATRO
ELEFTHERIOU VENIZELOU
Arhetypo Bookstore
Aqua World
FILIKIS ETERIAS
ELEFTHERIAS
G. PETRÁKIS
KANIADÁKI
N
3 & C
8, 9, 10,
11, H, Malia, Lasíthi, Aqua Plus & Lychnostatis Open-Air Museum
Iráklion, Old Hersónisos, 7, D & E
Piskopianó, Koutouloufári, I, J, 15, 16 & 17
CENTRAL HERSÓNISOS

ACCOMMODATION	
Caravan Camping	H
Camping Hersónisos	D
Creta Maris	E
Elgoni Apartments	I
Galaxy Villas	J
Haris Apartments	F
Ilios	G
Selena	C
Villa Marita	B
Zorba's Hotel	A

RESTAURANTS	
Il Camino	1
Taverna Creta	14
Taverna Emmanuel	17
Greek Corner	8
Kavouri	6
Nikis	3
Passage to India	13
Pithari	16
Sweet Home	9
Tria Adelphi	7
Vinnies Roof Garden	15

NIGHTLIFE	
Camelot	5
Homus	11
Jungle Club	12
New York	2
NRG	4
Star Water Park	10

sea, a seemingly endless ribbon of bars, travel agents, amusement arcades, beachwear shops, car and bike rental dealers, tawdry jewellery emporia and traffic jams. That said, the resort has plenty of life, lots of competition to keep food and drink prices down, and some really attractive rooms and restaurants in the hill villages behind. The one thing you may struggle to find in July or August is a room.

Exploring the town

Along the modern seafront, a solid line of restaurants and bars is broken only by the occasional souvenir shop. In their midst you'll find a small and remarkable **pyramidal fountain** with broken mosaics of fishing scenes. This dates from the Roman era and is the only real relic of the ancient town of **Chersonesos**, a thriving port from Classical Greek through to Byzantine times, handling trade from Lyttos, which once lay inland near Kastélli. The busy pleasure **harbour** to the west of the fountain is built over the ancient Roman one, and in odd places along the seafront you can see more remains of Roman harbour installations, mostly submerged. The headland above the harbour (known locally as Kastri) is a popular spot to watch the sun set. You can explore the excavated remains of an impressively large, early Christian basilica here – complete with mosaic floors – while on the far side of the headland the remains of ancient Roman fish tanks can be seen cut into the rock.

Other than these, most day-time interest is on the fringes of Hersónisos. There are decent stretches of sand both west and east, while the entertaining **Lychnostatis Open-Air Museum** of folk culture (Sun–Fri 9.30am–2pm; €4), on the eastern edge of town, is worth a visit, particularly if you haven't had a chance to see the "real thing" inland. A reasonably authentic-looking re-creation of a traditional Cretan village in a pleasant location next to the sea, the various exhibits relate to a way of life rapidly disappearing from the island. There are orchards and herb gardens, live displays of local crafts, such as ceramics and weaving, as well as collections of lace, embroidery and traditional costumes within the main house. Concerts of traditional music and dance are frequent, and they occasionally stage more elaborate "dance spectaculars" in the evening.

Watery entertainments include the **Star Water Park** (daily June–Sept 10am–7pm, April & May 10am–6pm; free entry, but charges for most activities; Ⓦwww.starbeach.gr) on the beach immediately east of the resort. There are kids' areas, pools, slides, bars and restaurants, as well as a wide range of watersports. **Acqua Plus** (May–Sept daily 10am–6pm; €16, children 5–12 €12, cut-price late-entry deals; Ⓦwww.acquaplus.gr), 3km inland on the route to the Lasíthi Plateau by the golf club, is the alternative, with bigger and better slides, plenty of pools and restaurants, but obviously no beach. Rather more sedately, **Aqua World** (April–Oct daily 10am–6pm; €5, children €3; Ⓦwww.aquaworld-crete.com) is a small aquarium in the centre of town, displaying many of the fish and sea creatures found off the island's coast, plus a selection of snakes and reptiles in the garden. At the harbour, a wide variety of **boat trips** to local beaches and islands are on offer.

Hill villages

In the hills directly above Límin Hersonísou are the three villages: **Koutouloufári**, **Piskopianó** and **"Old" Hersónisos**. These too are thoroughly touristy these days, heavily restored, and crowded with apartments, bars and tavernas, but they remain attractive, low-key (at least compared to the coast) and enjoyable, with great views. In the evening they're at their busiest as people trek up the hill to seek out the bars and restaurants; the village square of old Hersónisos is almost entirely surrounded by restaurants, often with conga-lines of Greek dancers weaving in and out of them.

Piskopianó has a small **Museum of Rural Life** (daily 9am–1pm & 4–8.30pm; €1.50), situated in one of the narrow streets leading off the main thoroughfare.

Practicalities

Buses run between Hersónisos and Iráklion virtually every half-hour from 6.30am to 11pm, and to Áyios Nikoláos only marginally less frequently. For shorter hops around town, **taxis** gather on the main street near where the buses stop, or around the *Creta Maris* hotel, or can be called on Ⓣ28970 22098. **Internet** cafés are liberally scattered, with several on the waterfront near the harbour, including good-value *Easy Internet Café*; a handy central one is *CNet* at Papadoyiorgi 10, to the side of the church. There are also a number of **launderettes**, the most central of which is Salon at Mínoos 15. The Arhetypo **bookshop**, at Arheo Théatro 11, near the main road at the western end of town, has a decent selection of guides and books in English. There are also **travel agencies** everywhere, offering a huge variety of local tours as well as horse-riding, boat trips, car hire and more.

Accommodation

Although you should have little problem finding somewhere to stay outside the peak season of July and August, much **accommodation** is allocated to package-tour operators and what remains is not cheap – in high season, you're unlikely to find anything less than €50 per night for a double room. The best way to find somewhere at this time may well be to call in at one of the many local travel agents.

Hotels in the centre are subject to a fair amount of noise both from traffic and – after dark – the vibrant nightlife and its aftermath. For more peaceful surroundings, it's best to head inland. If you have a car or don't mind a short taxi-ride or twenty-minute walk, the hill villages of Piskopianó or Koutouloufári are useful options – as is "Old" Hersónisos, although this is not within walking distance. There are also two small **campsites**: *Caravan Camping* (Ⓣ28970 24718), by the beach at the eastern end of Hersónisos, has ample places to camp in the shade, although the pitches can be extremely close to one another; *Camping Hersónisos* (Ⓣ28970 22902) is just to the west of town.

Creta Maris Ⓣ28970 22115, Ⓦwww.maris.gr. The ritziest place in the resort, with every facility you'd expect from a vast luxury hotel; the least expensive high-season room comes in at about €240, though off-season can be less than half that. ⑨

Elgoni Apartments Piskopianó Ⓣ28970 21237. Fully equipped studios and apartments in a small, white-washed complex with pool and bar, and great views over Hersónisos from a position above the village. ⑦

Galaxy Villas Koutouloufári, towards the eastern end of the village near the Sports Café Ⓣ28970 22910, Ⓦwww.galaxy-villas.com.gr. Comfortable, well-equipped a/c villa/apartments, with kitchens, in a pleasant complex with pool and bar, and views down over the coast. ⑦

Haris Apartments Eleftheríou Venizélou, on the west edge of town right by Ilios Ⓣ28970 22346. Good-value apartments with kitchens, a/c, pool and bar, though not the most peaceful location. There are several similar places nearby: right next door, slightly more basic *Apartments Argi* (Ⓣ2810 360300) shares the pool bar. ④

Ilios Omirou 2, on the west edge of town just back from the main road Ⓣ28970 22500, Ⓕ28970 22582. Standard hotel in a relatively quiet area with a rooftop pool and bar; extras include a/c rooms or fans. ⑤

Selena Maragáki 13 Ⓣ28970 22412. Clean, family-run establishment with a/c en-suite rooms on a quiet street just off the seafront (or signed off Venizelou), with its own seafront taverna. ④

Villa Marita Sanoudháki 20 Ⓣ28970 22310, Ⓦwww.villa-marita.gr. Set back from the street around a little garden courtyard, simple apartments for up to four people, all with kitchen and bath, some with a/c and TV. ⑤

Zorba's Hotel Navárhou Neárhou 26 Ⓣ28970 22075, Ⓦwww.hersonissos.com/zorbas. Friendly, rather old-fashioned hotel in a great position close to the harbour, overlooking the beach, though only a few rooms have those views. All rooms with TV, a/c, fridge and coffee-maker. ④

Eating

If you can't find something **to eat or drink** in Hersónisos, you should probably be taken out and shot. However, quality is not always a priority, especially among the waterfront places whose location is so irresistible that they don't need to try too hard. Better food and a more relaxed atmosphere are to be found out of town in the hill villages, where many places have roof terraces with views towards the coast – but even these are now succumbing to the hype and prices of the coast below.

In town

Il Camino on the waterfront near the harbour. Good pizzas from a wood-fired oven, along with other Italian dishes; they can't go far wrong with pizza, so one of the more reliable options on the central waterfront.

Greek Corner Elefthériou Venizélou 158, at the east end of the main street. Decent garden-terrace taverna offering the usual standards and some vegetarian options.

Kavouri Arhéou Théatro, at the west end of Venizélou. A good but slightly pricey traditional taverna, whose decor boasts a diverting mural of inebriated crab, octopus and other seafood; the house speciality is lamb with garlic and lemon wrapped in paper.

Nikis 25 Mártou, at the eastern end of the seafront. An international menu that's not significantly better than its neighbours, but a little further from the centre so less manic than many, with great views and a totally irresistible line in chat to draw in the punters.

Passage to India Petrakis, off the south side of Venizélou near the church. Excellent, authentic *tandoori* and other Indian dishes prepared by an emigré Asian family and served on a stylish terrace.

Sweet Home Elefthériou Venizélou 164. Hersónisos' best *zaharoplastío*, with a wide range of tarts and pastries and a pleasant terrace.

Taverna Creta Kaniadáki 4, off the south side of Venizélou slightly east of the church. Modest little taverna producing outstanding Cretan dishes which you select from the kitchen; *koklíes me risi* (snails with rice) is a house speciality. Open from noon until the food runs out, which in busy periods can be quite early in the evening.

Out of town

Taverna Emmanuel In the centre of Koutouloufári village. Pleasant and popular with reasonably authentic cooking, including lamb and potatoes baked in a traditional clay oven.

Pithari On the upper street through Koutouloufári village. Popular and pleasant taverna with roof terrace offering well-prepared Cretan dishes; a little on the expensive side.

Tria Adelphi (The Three Brothers) Just off the square in "Old" Hersónisos. This stands out as a more authentic taverna among the mass of more touristy places in the vicinity.

Vinnies Roof Garden The name may not sound promising, but it offers a lovely rooftop setting and some great home-cooked Greek food, as well as crêpes and excellent cocktails.

Nightlife

Hersónisos is renowned for its **nightlife** and there's certainly no shortage of it. A night's partying kicks off around the many **bars** ringing the harbour, which is packed with strollers and the overspill from countless noisy bars from 10pm through to the early hours. This is dancing on the tables territory, so if you fancy a quiet drink, head out of town again to the hill villages. Later on, the larger **disco-pubs** and **clubs** in the streets leading up to and along Elefthériou Venizélou are the places to be seen. Alternative entertainments include the **open-air cinema** attached to the *Creta Maris* hotel (showing regularly changing original-language films) or **Cretan evenings** at the **Lychnostatis Open-Air Museum** (see p.122) and elsewhere. Travel agencies also run evening trips to "cultural" evenings in the inland villages, such as Kósari and Anópoli, where noted dancers and musicians often appear.

Camelot Minóos 9 and Ayía Paraskeví. Glitzy dance club playing funk, Greek pop and techno.

Homus Five kilometres out of town along the road to Kastelli and next door to Acqua Plus waterpark (open July–Aug only). Claiming to have the best sound system (if not the loudest) on the island, this huge open-air dance venue busses in crowds from all over the north coast, and DJs from all over Europe. Opens at 10pm and goes on till dawn.

△ Out on the town in Mália

Jungle Club Elefthériou Venizélou right in the heart of town. The jungle theme is predictable, but there's lots of fun to be hand swinging through the trees.

New York On the waterfront near the Roman fountain (ⓦwww.new-york.gr). This beach bar and pleasant breakfast venue metamorphoses into a deafening disco-pub by night.

NRG 25 Mártiou on the central waterfront. Late-night basement dance club with occasional appearances by visiting DJs.

Star Water Park At the eastern end of town. The water park has a mega club, with wild foam parties on Sunday nights and frequent appearances by international DJs.

Stalídha

The rapidly expanding beach resort of **Stalídha**, sandwiched between the two ugly sisters of Mália and Hersónisos, is, sadly, no Cinderella. Undeniably it's quieter than its neighbours, but it's also a particularly characterless string of ribbon development without even the compensations of a manic nightlife. There is a decent beach, though, and dozens of indentikit restaurants, bars and "English" pubs. Among the better places to eat are the *Creta* restaurant, on the seafront right in the middle of town, or *Maria's House*, at the quieter, western end of the resort. Even if you wanted to stay, most of the **accommodation** is tied to tour companies: out of season try at the local travel agencies for bargain apartments.

Mália

MÁLIA is, perhaps, the most notorious resort in Crete: brash, commercial, with a reputation for wild and woolly nightlife. The **beach**, long and sandy as it is, becomes grotesquely crowded at times. Having said that, it can be a great place to stay if you're prepared to enter into the spirit of things – party all night and sleep all day – with the bonus of a genuine town that existed before the tourists came and a fabulous **Minoan palace** just down the road.

The town consists of two distinct parts either side of the main highway which, until the completion of the new bypass (now years behind schedule), brings all its traffic right through town. The raunchy heart of tourist life lies to the north towards the **beach**, where two main streets snake for a good kilometre towards the sea: one, Riáki, from the major junction near the western end of town; the other, Dhimokratías, a little further east. Along these, you'll find supermarkets, souvenir shops, travel agents, cafés, restaurants, video bars and nightclubs, and the streets eventually join for the final stretch before the water. To walk the length of this will take you about fifteen minutes – longer if you allow yourself to be enticed by the sales patter along the way, or after midnight, when it's at its busiest.

At the end there's a car park, a small harbour and a couple of beaches to the west. The **main beach**, however, stretches away to the east; in summer, you'll need to walk through the mass of bodies for about another fifteen minutes before you find somewhere to spread out. At this eastern end of the beach is a small **church** backed by dunes and patches of marshy ground alive with frogs. For entertainment, you can swim out to a tiny **offshore islet**: the rocks here are sharp for barefoot exploring, but your efforts will be rewarded by a (perpetually locked) white chapel and rock-pools alive with crabs, shellfish and sea urchins on the islet's seaward side.

South of the main road is the **old town**, with its narrow, twisting alleyways and whitewashed walls. Here you can still find traces of traditional life, as Mália determinedly clings to what remains of its self-respect.

Practicalities

In terms of both action and accommodation, Mália has a great deal more to offer than any of its rivals along the north coast, and practical matters are easily attended to, with a **post office** (Mon–Sat 7.30am–2pm) and plenty of banks and ATMs right in the centre on the main street, Eleftheriou Venizélou. **Internet** access is widely available too: one of the cheaper and faster places is *Citynet*, at Eleftheriou Venizélou 176. For **car and bike rental** head down the beach roads, where there are dozens of competing outfits: *Cretamotor* (☎28970 31457), about 200m down Dhimokratías, is a good bet for mopeds and quad bikes (readers with this *Guide* can claim a thirty-percent discount); *Motor Club*, a bit further down at Dhimokratías 40A (☎28970 32033), has good cars too. And, if you're shopping for food, look out for the tasty Cretan bananas sold at stalls throughout the centre: chances are they'll have been grown in the fields around the town.

Accommodation

As in Hersónisos, many rooms are taken up by the package industry, and in the peak season finding somewhere **to stay** may not be easy, although, unlike its near neighbours, Mália has a good range of small hotels and pensions in addition to apartment blocks and large resort hotels. Your best bet if you want any sleep is to avoid the Beach Road area: try one of the numerous rooms signed in the old town or on the fringes of the new. In the old town head up 25 Martíou towards the Town Hall – here you'll see signs to numerous rather basic rooms places including *Esperia* (☎28970 31086; ③), with en-suite balcony rooms with fan, and *Aspasia* (☎28970 31290; ②) for very basic, inexpensive rooms sharing a bath. There are numerous slightly more comfortable options off the main road back towards Iráklion (and to a lesser extent at the east end of town too), though you may face a trek to find somewhere with space. *Apartments Kipseli* (③), for example, has simple, non-a/c studios with kitchenette, fridge and small balcony; to find it look for the Argo Hotel on the main road, and it's down an alley opposite on the beach side. One central place if you're determined to be in the thick of the action is *Kostas* (☎28970 31101; ③), a family-run and surprisingly tranquil pension incongruously located behind the minigolf at the end of the beach road – to find it follow a small road on the right just beyond the minigolf, this winds around to the back of the course, where you should see the pension's sign. Alternatively, and for some of the more modern apartment complexes with pools, you'll save time by calling in at one of the many local travel agencies, such as Skoulikaris Travel, at the corner of 25 Martíou and Venizélou, which, in addition to giving information on local tours and car rental, can also give details of accommodation availability.

Eating

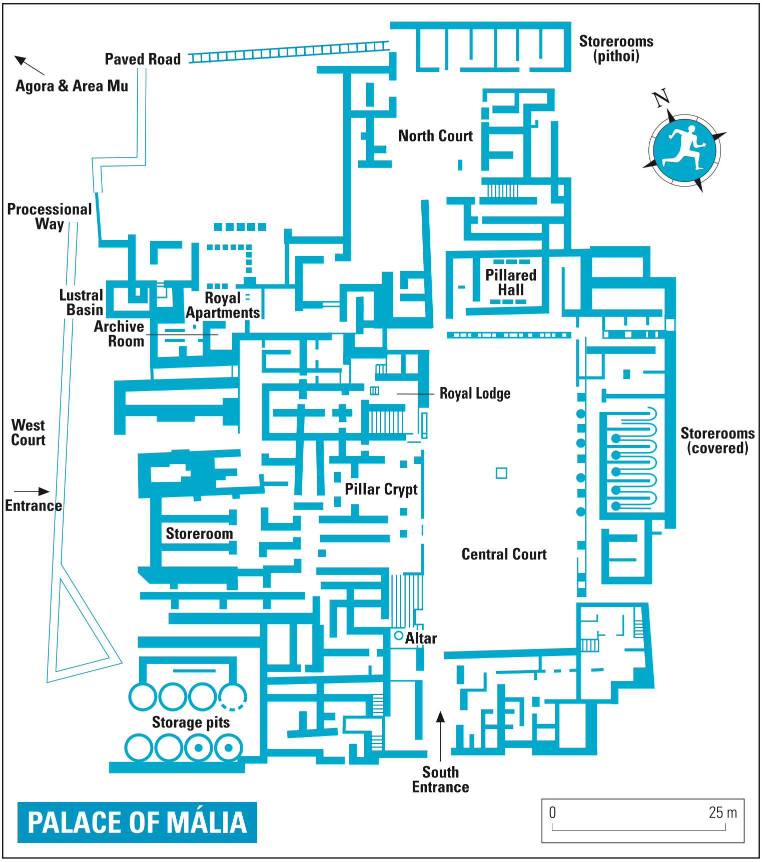
Restaurant owners jostle for your custom at every step in Mália, especially along the beach road; none is particularly good, but they know their clientele – *moussaká*, pie and chips and all-you-can-eat Mexican, Indian or Chinese places abound. You're far better off in the old town, or on Eleftheriou Venizélou, where there's plenty of good *souvláki* and fast food – try *Tzitzikas*, not far from the junction at the east end of town. Nearby, too, is the traditional *Lidos kafeníon*. In the **old town**, wander up towards Platía Ayíou Dhimitríou, a pleasant square beside the church of Áyios Dhimítrios, in and around which you can choose from a variety of more elegant bars, tavernas and restaurants, including *Elizabeth & Stablos*, with good barrel wine and an attractive upstairs terrace, or the simpler *Maria's Grill* next door. *Kalesma*, in a quiet backstreet not far away at the corner of Sokrátous and Omiróu, behind the *Sarpidon* apartment complex, is excellent. For a more typical Mália experience, check out the huge *San Giorgio* taverna, always packed, with loud Greek music, dancing and general fun – if you can't get in, its neighbours offer a similar, marginally less ear-splitting experience. To find them, follow the signs straight up from the junction at the east end of town. Finally, there are good pizzas at *Pizza Zorbas*, on 25 Martíou near the Town Hall.

Nightlife

Mália's beach road is transformed during the hours either side of midnight, when the profusion of **nightlife** joints – bars, discos and clubs – erupt into a pulsating cacophony. Most of them will have touts outside trying to lure you in, and in most you can see what you'll be letting yourself in for. The bigger, better clubs cluster around the point where the two beach roads meet: popular venues include *Camelot Castle*, *Sugar*, *Factory*, *The Venue*, *Apollo*, *Spice*, *Banana Club*, *Zig-Zag* and *Cloud 9*. There are plenty of "English pubs", too, with names like the *King's Arms* and *Union Jack*. Vast crowds of 18–30s – many in organized groups – stagger between the bars and clubs, and while the worst excesses of past years have been left behind, you do still get the odd confrontation. There are plenty of quieter bars in the old town, as well as a few newer, classier venues such as the *Paramithi Club*, in a traditional building right by the crossroads.

The Palace of Mália

The **Palace of Mália** (Tues–Sun 8am–5pm; €4; free for under 18s and EU students) lies 3km, or forty minutes' walk, east of town, just off the main road. Much less imposing than either Knossós or Festós, Mália in some ways surpasses both. For a start, it's a great deal emptier, and you can wander among the remains in relative peace. And while no reconstruction has been attempted, the palace was never re-occupied after its second destruction, so the ground plan is virtually intact. Of the **ruins**, virtually nothing stands much more than a metre above ground level apart from the giant *píthoi*, which have been pieced together and left about the place like sentinels: the palace itself is worn and brown, blending almost imperceptibly into the landscape. With the mountains behind, it's a thoroughly atmospheric setting. It's also a great deal easier to comprehend than Knossós, and if you've already seen the reconstructions there, it's easy to envisage this seaside palace in its days of glory. Basking on the rich agricultural plain


PALACE OF MÁLIA
Paved Road
Agora & Area Mu
Storerooms (pithoi)
North Court
Processional Way
Lustral Basin
Royal Apartments
Archive Room
Pillared Hall
Royal Lodge
West Court
Storerooms (covered)
Entrance
Pillar Crypt
Storeroom
Central Court
Altar
Storage pits
South Entrance
N
0
25 m

between the Lasíthi mountains and the sea, it retains a real flavour of an ancient civilization with a taste for the good life.

First discovered by Joseph Hatzidhákis early in the twentieth century, the site's excavation was handed over to the French School at Athens in 1922. As at Knossós and Festós, there was an earlier palace dating from around 1900 BC, which was devastated by the earthquake of about 1700 BC. The remains you see today are those of the palace built to replace this, which functioned until about 1450 BC, when it was destroyed for the last time in the wave of violence which swept across the island (see p.415). From this site came the famous **gold pendant** of two bees that can be seen in the Iráklion Archeological Museum and on any local postcard stand. It was allegedly part of a horde that was plundered; the rest of the collection now resides (as the "Aegina Treasure") in the British Museum. The beautiful **leopard's-head axe**, also in the museum at Iráklion, was another of the treasures found at Mália.

Any **bus** bound for Áyios Nikólaos will stop at the palace. Alternatively, you could rent a **bike** for the pleasant, flat ride out to the site, and stop for a swim on the way back.

Entering the palace: the West Court

The main palace is to the right of the site entrance, approached through the **West Court**. As at the other palaces, there are raised pathways leading across this, with the main one heading south towards the area of the eight circular **storage pits**. These probably held grain; the pillars in the middle of some would once have supported a protective roof. In the other direction, the raised walkway takes you to the building's north side, where you can pick up the more substantial paved road that apparently led to the sea.

Entering the palace itself through a "door" between two rocks and jinking right then left, you arrive in the **North Court**, by the storerooms and their elaborately decorated, much-photographed giant *píthoi*. Off to the right are the so-called Royal Apartments, on the far side of which is a well-preserved lustral basin or bath. Nearby lies the **Archive Room**, where a number of Linear A tablets were unearthed. Straight ahead is the **Pillared Hall**, which the excavators, encouraged by the discovery of some cooking pots, think may have been a kitchen (if correct, the relative location is almost exactly the same as that of the palace kitchen at Zákros). Above the hall, a grand dining room would have looked out over the courtyard.

The Central Court and Royal Apartments

Mália's **Central Court**, a long, narrow area, about 48m in length by 22m wide, is only slightly smaller than the main courtyards at Knossós and Festós. Look out for the remains of the columns that once supported a portico at this northern end, and for traces of a similar portico down the eastern side. Still-visible post-holes were discovered between these columns by the excavators, suggesting that the court could be fenced in – possibly to protect the spectators during the bull-jumping games which may have been held here. Behind the eastern portico are more storerooms, now under a canopy. In the centre of the court is a shallow pit which may have been used for sacrifices; if this was indeed its purpose then, along with Anemospília, these are the only such Minoan sacrificial areas to have been discovered.

On the west side of the courtyard are the remains of two important stairways. The first led to the upper floor beside what is termed the **Royal Lodge** or Throne Room, which overlooks the courtyard. The second, in the southwest corner, comprises the bottom four steps of what was the main ceremonial stair to the first floor, still impressive in its scale. Beside this is the curious *kernos*, or **altar**. The purpose of this heavy limestone disc, with 34 hollows around its rim and a single bigger one in the centre, is disputed: one theory suggests an altar where, at harvest time, samples of the first fruits of the Cretan crops would be placed in the hollows as offerings to a fertility goddess, while other theories have it as a point for tax collecting or even an ancient gaming board.

The rooms along the west side of the court also merit exploration. Between the two staircases ran a long room which may have gone straight through to the upper floor, like a medieval banqueting hall. Behind this is the **Pillar Crypt**, where the double-axe symbol was found engraved on the two main pillars. Behind the Pillar Crypt runs yet another corridor of storerooms; only accessible through areas which had some royal or religious significance, these would doubtless have been depositories for things of value – the most secure storage at the palace.

New discoveries

The excavations at Mália are by no means complete. Inside and beyond the fenced site to the north and west, digs are still going on, as an apparently sizeable town comes slowly to light.

Beneath a canopy to the west of the northern end of the palace lies the **Agora** (or Hypostyle Hall). This building consists of a number of rooms – apparently shops or market stalls – and two interconnected halls of uncertain function, described as the **Crypt**. Benches run round three sides of the Crypt, leading some to speculate that this was some form of council chamber.

From here, a gate leads to **area "M"** (or Mu – the site is divided up by archeologists using the letters of the Greek alphabet), in a second fenced area almost as large as the palace itself. Here a large section of the town dependent on the palace is protected by a spectacular canopy. You can walk above and around it on a suspended walkway, looking down on workshops, dwellings, some preserved up to roof level, and streets that give a clear idea of the considerable scale of the complex community that surrounded the palace. In one small area a section of wood-beamed roof has been reconstructed, and there's a series of what are believed to have been ritual or **cult rooms**. Several of the other cult rooms yielded statuary, libation vessels and other artefacts connected with religious ceremonies. Archeologists are still trying to piece together exactly what connection this complex had with the palace. Was it possibly the "monastery" of a priesthood serving the palace but living separately from it, or could it have served as a temporary home for the whole palace elite whilst some restoration or repair was carried out to the palace proper? Many of the most interesting finds from this area are displayed in the museum at Áyios Nikólaos (see p.178), but at the site entrance there's a small **exhibition** on the excavations (especially the more recent ones) which is well worth a look and includes a model of Quartier Mu as it might have looked.

Some 500m to the north (close to the sea, outside the main fenced area) is the *Chrysolakkos* or **Golden Pit**, which appears to have been a large, multichambered mausoleum dating from the Old Palace period. Its elaborate construction suggests a royal burial-place, as does the wealth of grave goods discovered here, among them the gold honeybee pendant. The site is reached by turning right (west) on leaving the palace site, and then turning right again along a dirt track which heads northeast towards the sea. The fenced pit lies some 300m down the track, just before the islet of Ayía Varvára, visible offshore. The site is located slightly inland, opposite a headland where caves were used as ossuaries in ancient times.

On the way back from the palace site to the main road, take a look over the fence to the left at more **new excavations** (Quartier "E") which further underline the enormity of the urban area surrounding the palace. There are many substantial buildings here, including a large mansion where fragments of painted plaster were discovered, suggesting a sumptuously decorated interior.

Back to town via the beach

Leaving the site and turning immediately right, you can follow signs towards Sun Beach. Here there are free trampolines and pools, plus plenty of opportunities to spend money on loungers, drinks, amusements and watersports. Nearby, especially to the west, are plenty of quieter patches of sand where you can escape the worst of the crowds. **Moving on**, you can easily walk back along the shore to Mália itself, or to the main road, where buses pass every thirty minutes – either west to Iráklion or east towards Áyios Nikólaos.

Southeast of Iráklion: the Pedhiádha

The hinterland east of Iráklion and south of Hersónisos consists mainly of hilly farm country, with large, widely scattered villages. Known as the **Pedhiádha**, this region is quietly prosperous but sees few visitors. Indeed, if you're reliant on public transport there's little opportunity to take in a great deal of what the area has to offer – most villages are served only by their daily market bus. But with your own transport, it makes for enjoyably aimless touring, and certainly the inland roads are far more attractive than the coastal one.

The delights of touring this area lie as much in the verdant countryside as anything else, but possible diversions include the ancient site of **Lyttos** and some notable **frescoed churches** around **Kastélli**, as well as a number of scenic farming villages as the route ascends to the Lasíthi plateau.

Kastélli and the frescoed churches

The area's chief village, **Kastélli**, or Kastélli Pedhiádhos, is a pleasant enough place to pause for a while, and perhaps even to stop over if you've an interest in seeking out some of the many nearby churches and ancient ruins. Chiefly an agricultural centre whose prosperity derives from the olive groves and vineyards spread across the surrounding hills, the town goes its own way, largely unaffected by the tourist zone on the coast below. Still, there are some comfortable modern **rooms**, the best of which – with bath and TV and even a small pool – are to be had at the *Hotel Kalliopi* (ⓣ28910 32685, ⓦwww.kalliopi-hotel.gr; ③), close to the central crossroads. For **eating and drinking**, there are a number of bars and *souvláki* places around the main junction, and just south of here, on the further inland of the roads signed to Iráklion, is the town's best food option – *Irida*, an excellent local restaurant and pizzeria which uses the garden of an elegant early twentieth-century Neoclassical mansion (opposite) as its terrace. The main attraction of the place is the countryside, where winding lanes are traced by elderly oak and plane trees, and the many smaller satellite villages, often with frescoed medieval **churches** to visit. As you drive around, look out for signs to such churches, which are usually worth seeking out simply for the journey off the main routes, even if very often you can't find anyone to let you in.

One of the more famous of these churches is the fifteenth-century **Isódhia Theótokon**, with fine Byzantine frescoes, near the village of **Sklaverohóri** just a couple of kilometres west of Kastélli. The key is available from the house with a vine trellis about 50m before the church, on the right. Six kilometres further west again, down a side road beyond Apostolí, the **Moní Angaráthou** is in another pleasant location. Although the monastery's church dates from the last century, the surrounding buildings are mainly sixteenth-century and include a picturesque white-walled courtyard with palms, orange trees and cypresses. Another church is **Áyios Yeóryios** at **Ksidhás** (confusingly also known as Lyttos), about 3km east of Kastélli, which has frescoes dated by an inscription to 1321.

However, should you decide to see only one of the many churches in this area, make it **Áyios Pandeleímon**, off the road towards Hersónisos. To get there, set off north for a good kilometre out of Kastélli and you'll see a sign for "Paradise Tavern". The various turnings along the narrow, paved road are signed, and the way is shaded with huge old trees. The church itself, surprisingly large, is set in a grove of oaks and planes around a spring which was very likely a sanctuary in ancient times. This idyllic spot also shelters the small *Paradise Taverna* run by the eccentric Nikolaides family. Restoration work at the time of writing meant that the church was temporarily closed, but it should have re-opened. Inside are imposing though weathered frescoes of the soldier saints (on the north wall) and an unusual scene of Ayía Ánna nursing the infant Mary. The structure of the church, probably early thirteenth century, is interesting for the way it incorporates parts of the original tenth-century basilica and uses as columns some much older fragments, probably taken from Lyttos. The **aqueduct** that once transported water to the ancient city passes close by, and you may spot parts of it as you drive around.

About 7km southwest of Kastélli, the large village of **Thrapsanó** has for centuries been an important **pottery-making** centre. Workshops still thrive in the village and along the roads out towards Vóni and Evangelismós, and many of them welcome visitors to admire the potters' skills, although there's not a great deal on offer to buy. There is, though, a good range of earthenware: *píthoi* are evident throughout Thrapsanó, not only in workshops but upturned in the main square and on the backs of parked pickup trucks. Both Thrapsano and Réthimnon's pottery centre, Margarítes (see p.258), have found a new export market in recent years for these giant *píthoi*. In northern Europe, they have become popular decorative features for urban gardens, and both centres have been stretched to keep up with demand.

Ancient Lyttos

A road climbs for 2km north of Ksidhás, east of Kastélli, to the site of ancient **Lyttos**, a prominent city of Dorian Crete that is mentioned by Homer as leading the Cretan contingent in the Trojan War. The ruins are located between the two small **stonebuilt chapels** of Tímios Stavrós and Áyios Yeóryios, which serve as useful landmarks as you approach. Occupying a magnificent position in the foothills of the Dhíkti range, Lyttos was one of the most powerful city-states of Classical Greece during the centuries prior to the Roman conquest, and was the bitter enemy of Górtys, Ierápytna (modern Ierápetra) and especially Knossós. When Lyttos engaged these three in a **war** for control of the island (221–219 BC), it overreached itself; whilst its army was launching an attack on Ierápetra, Knossós seized the opportunity to destroy the unguarded city, leaving it in ruins and taking its women and children into captivity. The historian Polybius vividly describes how, on their return to Lyttos, the troops broke down in tears at the sight, refused to enter their devastated homes and went for succour to Lappa (see p.252) near Réthimnon, one of its few allies. The city was eventually rebuilt, however, and enjoyed a small-scale renaissance under the Romans through to Byzantine times.

Sadly, what is visible above ground today in no way reflects the city's ancient status, as no systematic archeological exploration has yet taken place. Nevertheless what you can see underlines the fact that when the riches of Lyttos are finally excavated – including what is said to be the island's largest theatre, now lost – it will be an important site. Below the church of Tímios Stavrós, built over a large fifth-century basilica with stones from the ancient city, are the bastions and curtain of an enormous **city wall**. The church is believed to mark the centre, or agora, of Lyttos. The church of **Áyios Yeóryios** (which has fragmentary frescoes) is also constructed from stones scavenged from Lyttos: incorporated into the outer wall is a fine fragment of carved acanthus foliage. Nearby, the ancient city's **bouleterion** or council chamber has been excavated, with visible platforms and benches. Spend half an hour roaming through the vines and olive groves on the surrounding slopes and you'll come across partially excavated dwellings, delicately carved tombstones, half-buried pillars and the enormous foundation stones of buildings waiting to be unearthed.

Towards the Lasíthi plateau

The one inland route which visitors follow in any numbers is the drive from Iráklion up to the **Lasíthi plateau** (see p.170). Starting from Iráklion, the normal route is to follow the E75 highway as it bypasses Hersónisos, where a well-signed road ascends towards Kastélli, and then turn off east through the Aposelémis valley to Potamiés and Goníes. The attractions are charmingly simple: scenery which becomes increasingly mountainous as you climb towards the plateau; old trees spreading beside the road, and still older churches in the villages. Alternative routes – dramatically wild and lonely, with spectacular views – wind up from the E75 near Stalídha, and from the centre of Mália.

Potamiés and Moní Gouverniótissa

Leaving the E75 on the main route, look out for the ruins of the **Roman aqueduct** – visible in a ravine below the road – which carried water from springs in the hills near ancient Lyttos to its port at Hersónisos. Soon after (past the golf course and water park), you turn off the Kastélli road towards **POTAMIÉS**. Approaching the village you'll see signs to the tenth-century monastery of the **Panayía Gouverniótissa** (Assumption of the Virgin), one of the oldest in Crete. Immediately off the main road, a track leads for 100m or so down to the small, frescoed Byzantine chapel of **Sotíros Christós** (usually locked). For the monastery, a paved track climbs for a kilometre or so through olive groves to a shaded parking space. The old buildings here are gradually being restored, and there's likely to be a workman or caretaker around to open any locked doors (if not, the key to the chapel is available from the *kafenío* at the edge of Potamiés). The enormous **ovens** that once fed the brethren are still in evidence, and precarious staircases (not for the fainthearted) climb to the dormitories above. The tiny **chapel**, which still attracts visitors and the faithful, stands close by in a peaceful garden with a shady lemon tree. Inside are restored **frescoes** dating from the fourteenth century, with a fine *Pantokrátor* in the dome.

Five kilometres further on is **AVDHOÚ**, where there are more fine, very faded frescoes from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in three churches: Áyios Andónios, Áyios Konstantínos and Áyios Yeóryios. The churches should be open; if not, enquiries in the village cafés should produce the necessary keys.

Krási and Panayía Kardhiótissa

The village of **KRÁSI**, just off the road, is curiously named – curious because Krasí translates as "wine", but the village's fame is in fact based on water, in the form of a curative spring. This is situated under stone arcading in the shade of an enormous **plane tree**, which is claimed to be two thousand years old and the largest in Europe, with a girth that cannot be encircled by twelve people. Flanking the tree are a couple of **tavernas**. Krási's waters are reputed to be especially good for stomach complaints.

Not much further on, just before the village of **Kerá**, the convent of **Panayía Kardhiótissa** (Our Lady of the Heart; daily 8am–2pm & 4–8pm; €2) lies immediately below the road and is one of the most important places of worship on Crete, with an annual celebration on September 8. The buildings date from the twelfth century, and though the heavily refurbished exterior of the monastery looks like whitewashed concrete, the interior is undeniably spectacular, with restored **frescoes** throughout. These came to light only in the 1960s, when they were discovered beneath accumulated layers of paint. There is also a copy of a famous twelfth-century icon of the Virgin, the original of which was taken to Rome in 1498. According to legend, successive attempts by the Turks to steal this copy were thwarted when it found its way back to Kerá, despite being chained to a marble pillar; the pillar is now in the monastery yard, while the chain (kept inside the church) is believed to alleviate pain when wrapped around the bodies of the afflicted. There's an attractive little museum too.

△ Chapel, Panayía Kardhiótissa

The ascent to Séli Ambélou

Beyond the village of Kerá, the road winds on into the Dhiktean mountains, and the views become progressively more magnificent. To the left, **Mount Karfí** looms ominously, its summit over 1100m above sea level. This spire-like peak (*karfí* means "nail" in Greek) was one of the sites where the Minoan civilization made its last stand, following the collapse of the great centres after the twelfth century BC. In the face of Dorian advances, the last of the Minoans fled to remote refuges such as this, keeping alive shadowy vestiges of their culture. The solitary peak, now identified as a Minoan sanctuary, stands as a silent witness to the end of Europe's first great civilization. There's a scary-looking track to the site of **ancient Karfí** (see p.172), some 5km away, from the car park at the ludicrous **Homo Sapiens Village**.

The road continues to climb to the dramatic pass of **Séli Ambélou**, flanked by ruined stone windmills. Beyond, the Lasíthi plateau suddenly unfolds before you. Almost straight ahead, on the far side of the plateau, the highest peaks of the range dominate the landscape, with **Mount Dhíkti** – all 2148m of it – at their heart. The *Séli Ambélou* taverna here at the pass often serves barbecued roast lamb and is a good place to stop and take in the sights (though you may have to share them with a coach party or two) – looking out to sea, on clear days you can see as far as the island of Thíra (Santoríni), over 100km distant.

South of Iráklion: across the island

The southern half of Iráklion province is very different from the north: there's just one resort of any size – **Mátala** – and a day-trip route that takes in the major archeological sites of **Górtys**, **Festós** and **Ayía Triádha**. The rest is countryside with few concessions to tourism, which is not to say that the area is undeveloped: on the contrary, it represents the island's single most important location for agriculture. The **Messará plain**, in particular, has always been a vital resource, and its importance is reflected in the number of large and wealthy villages here.

The **south coast**, with the exception of Mátala, is relatively little visited, and a good part of it is quite inaccessible: east of **Léndas** (where there's excellent sand) lies well over 30km of shoreline with no real road access at all. In the southeast, roads head down to the coast for the tiny, low-key resorts of **Tsoútsouros**, **Keratókambos**, **Árvi** and **Tértsa**.

There are a number of roads that run from Iráklion towards the south coast, but almost all the traffic seems to follow the route that heads slightly southwest, towards Festós and Mátala. Plenty of **buses** come this way too, leaving from the Pórta Haníon (Haniá Gate) terminal and heading for Festós, Mátala, Léndas, or Ayía Galíni via Timbáki. **Míres**, in the heart of the Messará plain, is the southern junction for switching between these various routes. The only other regular bus service across the island from Iráklion runs southeast towards **Ierápetra**, via Áno Viánnos.

Southwest from Iráklion

Crossing the island **southwest from Iráklion** is not, on the whole, the most exciting of drives: on the western outskirts of the city you turn south, under the highway, following the signs to Festós and Míres. From the beginning, the road climbs, heading up to the island's spine through thoroughly business-like countryside. This is more of what traditionally was the **Malevísi**, or Malmsey, wine-producing region (see p.118): though some wine is still made, most of the grapes you'll see now are table grapes, grown for eating rather than pressing. Highlights along this route include an ancient site at **Rhizenía**, as well as picturesque medieval **monasteries** at Veneráto and Zarós, the latter a particularly pleasant hill village surrounded by fine **walking country** and with a small lake nearby.

Ano Asítes and ancient Rhizenía

With your own transport, you can follow a scenic detour by taking a right turn 12km south of Iráklion along the route signed for Voutés, Áyios Míronas and Pírgou. This road skirts the eastern slopes of the valley and is a wonderful undulating ride through some pleasant out-of-the-way villages, mostly prosperous farming places. At **Áno Asítes** the **E4 Pan-European walking route** crosses the south end of the village, coming down from the Psilorítis mountains.

On a sharp hairpin bend, 3km south of here and 2km north of Priniás, a pair of remarkable **rock-cut tombs** can be seen on the right, part of the cemetery of ancient **Rhizenía**, which occupied the flat-topped hill to the east. Founded at the end of the Bronze Age, possibly by Minoans fleeing the Dorian invasion of the north coast, Rhizeniá later flourished as a Greek city, and the remains of two temples have been discovered on the acropolis. To visit the site, continue beyond the hairpin to where a sign (to "Prinías archeological site") directs you up a short, just about driveable track, with the **acropolis** and landmark whitewashed chapel of Áyios Pandeleímon visible above. Although not a lot remains of the ancient town, the sheer quantity of broken shards littering the ground is evidence that this was once a substantial conurbation. Nosing around, you'll come across the footings of ancient dwellings, with steps and porches clearly identifiable. When you eventually reach the chapel, at the northern tip of the peak, you're greeted with astonishing **views** in all directions, especially north towards Iráklion and the sea, with the island of Día beyond.

South from here, 3km beyond **Priniás**, the road rejoins the main route at Ayía Varvára.

Moní Palianí and Ayía Varvára

If you're taking the direct route to Ayía Varvára there's the option of a well-signed two-kilometre detour to **Moní Palianí** from the village of Veneráto**.** An ancient monastic foundation (dating perhaps from as early as the seventh century) and now a thriving convent, Palianí has at its heart a sacred ancient **myrtle tree** (said to be as much as 1000 years old) credited with healing powers. Its every twig hung with *tamata* (ex-votos), there's a powerful feeling that the rituals based around the tree predate the monastery, and even Christianity itself, by some centuries. Around the tree is a tranquil, plant-filled courtyard with a thirteenth-century chapel to one side. You can also buy lace, embroidery and other items hand-crafted by the nuns in a small shop.

Ayía Varvára, 8km south of Veneráto, is the main village of this area, a place known as the **omphalos** (navel) **of Crete**. The great chapel-topped rock which you see as you arrive is held to be the very point around which the island balances, its centre of being. Not that this makes for any great tourist attraction. There are plenty of cafés and shops along the main street, but they cater mostly for local farmers in search of a bag of fertilizer or a tractor part.

Zarós and around

On the southern fringe of Ayía Varvára, a turning takes off to the west, following the flank of the Psilorítis range towards Kamáres (see p.267) and eventually on to Réthimnon or down to Ayía Galíni. This is a beautiful drive on relatively good, empty roads. **ZARÓS**, 17km west of Ayía Varvára, is a particularly attractive village famous for its spring waters, which are bottled and sold all over Crete (the bottling plant is at the far edge of the village). It makes a good place to stay overnight, to explore the local monasteries and the lake and for some excellent walking.

The pick of the local **accommodation** is undoubtedly the new *Eleonas Traditional Resort* (☎28940 31238, ⓦwww.eleonas.gr; ⑤) in the hills behind the village near the lake – follow signs from the bottling plant or lake. The brand-new, traditionally built villas here have galleried bedrooms and every facility including kitchen, air conditioning, TV and a fireplace; there's also an excellent taverna using local produce and activities including horse-riding. Not far away the *Idi Hotel* (☎28940 31301, ⓦwww.votomos.com; ③ including breakfast), on the road to the lake, is also a comfortable place to get away from it all. There's a roaring spring directly outside the hotel, and an abandoned watermill, while the hotel's taverna, and numerous others nearby, make a speciality of the trout that splash around in the trout farm behind. Zarós village itself has some cheaper rooms, including the very friendly *Rooms Keramos* (Ⓣ28940 31352; ② including breakfast), signed off the main street just before the post office.

Lake Vótamos and Roúvas Gorge

Just a kilometre or so out of Zarós, well signed for both walkers and drivers, deep-green **Lake Vótamos** is overlooked by rocky heights. Tiny as it is, it's a lovely setting, and the lakeside bar and taverna – *Limni* – is, if only for its location, the pick of the local tavernas. The evenings here can be truly magical (providing you remember to bring your mosquito repellent). It's run by the same family as the *Eleonas Resort*, and they are also responsible for many of the excellent signs that help walkers find their way around the local sights.

A number of well-marked paths start at the lake, the pick of them being the climb past **Moní Áyios Nikólaos** and through the Roúvas Gorge to the chapel of Áyios Ioánnis. You can also drive to the monastery by heading west on the main road out of the village, and then 2km up a signed road. The monastery itself, dwarfed by a vast, half-built concrete church, is very welcoming, and the elderly monks will usually offer some refreshment to passers-by as well as opening the chapel so you can view the fourteenth-century paintings within.

Above the monastery the track snakes back and forth across an increasingly steep mountainside before reaching, in about 2km, the entrance to the **Roúvas Gorge**. The gorge is a spectacular walk on a good path, tough going at times despite the wooden walkways which help in the steeper sections. Another couple of kilometres climbing and you arrive at the chapel of Áyios Ioánnis, on the E4 trans-island walking route. Here the easy option is to turn around and head down the way you came for a well-earned drink by the lake, a couple of hours away. With an early start and plenty of provisions you could take the more amibitious option of heading east on the E4 to Áno Asítes (p.135) and picking up a taxi back from there, but be warned that this is a good 20km of high-altitude mountain walking on rough paths – the rewards are spectacular views and plenty of bird and plant life.

Moní Vrondísi and Moní Valsamónero

The fourteenth- to seventeenth-century **Moní Vrondísi**, above the road about 3km beyond the turn-off for Moní Áyios Nikólaos, is a gloriously peaceful foundation overlooking the Koútsoulidi valley with views towards Festós and the Gulf of Messará. In a tranquil courtyard surrounded by monks' cells (mostly empty) and fronted by two fig trees is the monastery's simple limestone **church**. Inside are some fine fourteenth-century **frescoes**, including a moving depiction of the Last Supper, and a collection of icons taken from the nearby church of Áyios Fanoúrios. Vrondísi itself has given up the finest of its artworks, including the six great panels by Dhamaskinós, to the icon gallery of Ayía Ekateríni in Iráklion (see p.89). For most locals, however, the attraction of Vrondísi is not art, but the cool water gushing from a fifteenth-century Venetian fountain, with figures of Adam and Eve, near the entrance. Here you can fill up your empty bottles with fine mountain spring water (the same stuff that's bottled down the road) for free.

Áyios Fanoúrios, all that survives of the **Moní Valsamónero**, is reached by a track from the next village, **Vorízia**. This church houses some of the best **frescoes** in Crete, painted in the fifteenth century by Konstantínos Ríkos and depicting scenes from the life of the *Panayía* (Virgin Mary), images of various saints and a fine *Pantokrátor*. The guardian is on site most weekdays (official opening hours Mon–Fri 8am–3pm), but if not he can be found in the village.

The road continues 3km west of Vorízia to reach Kamáres and a possible ascent to the Kamáres Cave (see p.267).

The Messará plain

Continuing by the main road south from Ayía Varvára the way becomes genuinely mountainous, and after 7km you cross the Vourvoulítis Pass (650m) and enter the watershed of the Messará. The **Messará plain**, a long strip running east from the Gulf of Messará, is the largest and most important of Crete's fertile flatlands. Bounded to the north by the Psiloritis range and the lower hills that run right across the centre of the island, to the east by the Dhiktean mountains, and to the south by the narrow strip of the Asteroússia and Kófinas hills, it is watered, somewhat erratically, by the Yeropótamos. Heavy with olives, and increasingly with the fruit and vegetable cash crops that dominate the modern agricultural economy, the plain has always been a major centre of population and a mainstay of the island's economy. There is much evidence of this, not only at the ancient sites of **Górtys**, **Festós** and **Ayía Triádha**, but at a wealth of lesser, barely explored sites; today's villages exude prosperity, too, surrounded by neat and intensive cultivation.

As you descend to the plain by a series of long, looping curves, the main road heads west through **Áyii Dhéka**. A left turn eastwards takes you across far less travelled country (see p.156) and all the way to Ierápetra.

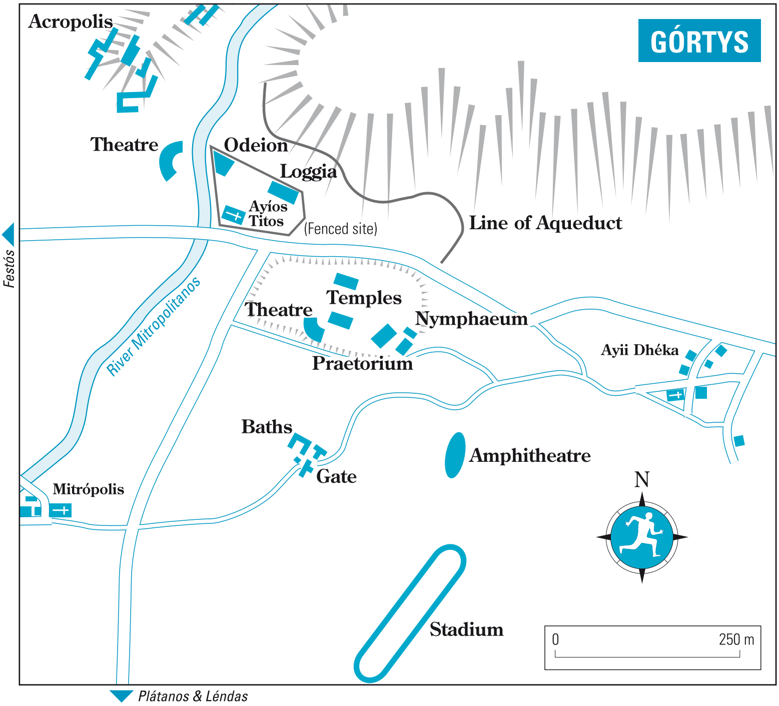
Áyii Dhéka

ÁYII DHÉKA, served by frequent buses from Iráklion, is the first village you reach on the Messará and the most interesting. The place takes its name from ten early Christians who were martyred here around 250 AD, at the behest of the emperor Decius. The **Holy Ten** are still among the most revered of Cretan saints: regarded as martyrs for Crete as much as Christianity, they were the first in a heroic line of Cretans who laid down their lives to oppose tyrannical occupation. On the west side of the village are two churches associated with them: the older, originally Byzantine **church** is signed to the south of the main road. Inside, there's an icon portraying the martyrdom of the saints and – preserved in a glass case beneath – the stone block on which they are supposed to have been decapitated. The more modern **chapel** is signed from the main road to the west of the village, where a lane heads south to reach it. Beneath this is a crypt, visible from the exterior, where you can see six of their tombs. Other reminders of the village's ancient past include the Roman statues, pillars and odd blocks of masonry scavenged from Górtys which are much in evidence – reused in modern houses, propping up walls or simply lying about in yards.

Though somewhat marred by the constant stream of traffic, Áyii Dhéka is a handy place to break your journey, and in the centre there are a number of roadside cafés and tavernas for **food**, plus a few signs offering **rooms** – *Dimitris Taverna* (☎28920 31560; ②) has both, with good-value en-suite air-conditioned rooms and tables on a terrace (with view) at the rear.

Górtys

The remnants of the ancient city of **GÓRTYS** (known traditionally as Gortyn or Gortyna) are scattered across a large, fragmented area, covering a great deal more than the fenced site beside the road that most people see. The best way to get some idea of the ancient city's scale is to follow the path through the fields from the village. This heads out more or less parallel to the road, opposite the chapel of Áyii


GÓRTYS
Acropolis
Theatre
Odeion
Loggia
Ayíos Titos
(Fenced site)
Line of Aqueduct
Festós
River Mitropolitanos
Theatre
Temples
Nymphaeum
Praetorium
Ayii Dhéka
Baths
Gate
Amphitheatre
Mitrópolis
N
Stadium
0
250 m
Plátanos & Léndas

Dhéka, and is an easy walk of less than a kilometre to the main site; along the way you'll skirt most of the major remains.

Settled from at least Minoan times, when it was a minor subject of Festós, Górtys began its rise to prominence under the Dorians. By the eighth century BC it had become a significant commercial power and in the third century BC it finally conquered its former rulers at Festós. The society was a strictly regulated one, with a citizen class (presumably Dorian) ruling over a population of serfs (presumably "Minoan" Cretans) and slaves. Even for the citizens, life was as hard and orderly as it was in Classical Sparta.

Evidence of early Górtys has survived thanks largely to the remarkable **law code** found here, and to a lesser extent through treaties known to have existed between the Górtys of this era and its rivals, notably Knossós. **Hannibal** fled to Górtys, where he stayed briefly after his defeat by Rome, and later the city helped the **Romans** to conquer Crete. It was during the Roman era that the city reached its apogee, from 67 BC onwards: as the seat of a Roman praetor, it was capital of the province of Crete and Cyrenaica, ruling not only the rest of the island but also much of Egypt and North Africa. It was here that **Christianity** first reached Crete, when St Titus was despatched by St Paul to convert the islanders, but after the **Saracen** invasion in the ninth century, when much of the city was razed, Górtys was abruptly abandoned.

South of the road: the Roman city

In the fields en route to the site, it is the **Roman city** that dominates: this once stretched from the edges of Áyii Dhéka to the far banks of the Mitropolitanos (then known as the *Lethe*) and from the hills in the north as far south as the modern hamlet of Mitrópolis, where a small Roman basilica with good mosaics has been excavated. For most people, though, the ruins along the main path, with others seen standing in the distance, and the tantalizing prospect of what lies unexcavated beneath hummocks along the way, are quite enough. Individually, or in another setting, these might seem unimpressive, but with so many of them, abandoned as they are and all but ignored, they are amazing – you almost feel as if you've discovered them for yourself. The sites that have been excavated here are mostly seen only through locked fences.

The **Praetorium** (the Roman governor's palace) has left the most extensive remains, a vast pile built originally in the second century, rebuilt in the fourth, and occupied as a monastery right up to the time of the Venetian conquest. Excavations in this area have revealed impressive foundations, flights of steps, walls and marble columns once belonging to imposing buildings, all indicating how much more still lies beneath the olive groves waiting to be discovered. Within the same fenced area is a courtyard containing fountains and the **Nymphaeum**. Somewhere near here, too, was the terminus of the main aqueduct that brought water from the region of modern Zarós. About 100m to the west of the Praetorium area is the **Temple of Pythian Apollo**, the most important of the Roman city's temples, later converted to a church, while the nearby **theatre**, though small, is very well preserved. Some 50m north of here are the substantial remains of the **Temple of Isis and Serapis**.

The fenced site

From the theatre or the Temple of Isis and Serapis, you can cut up to the road and cross to the parking area which marks the entrance to the main **fenced site** (daily 8am–7pm; €4, free for under 18s and EU students). As you enter, it is the church of **Áyios Títos** which immediately grabs the eye, the back of its apse rising high in front of you. This is the only part of the church that has survived intact, but the shape of the whole structure is easy enough to make out. When it was built (around the end of the sixth century), it would have been the island's chief church, and it is the best remaining example of an early Christian church in the Aegean: you can see the extent to which it is still revered from the little shrine at the end of one of the aisles. The church's capitals bear the monogram of the sixth-century Byzantine emperor Justinian.

Beyond the church lies an area that was probably the ancient forum, and beyond this the most important relic of ancient Górtys, the **Odeion** (or covered theatre) and its **law code**. The law code – a series of engraved stones some 9m long and 3m high – dates from around 500 BC, but it presumably codified laws that were long established by custom and practice. It provides a fascinating insight into a period of which relatively little is otherwise known; the laws are written in a very rough Doric Cretan dialect and inscribed alternately left to right and right to left, so that the eyes can follow the writing continuously (a style known as *boustrophedon*, after the furrows of an ox plough). The code is not a complete system of law but rather a series of rulings on special cases, and reflects a strictly hierarchical society in which there were at least three distinct classes – citizens, serfs and slaves – each with quite separate rights and obligations. Five witnesses were needed to convict a free man of a crime, while one could convict a slave; the rape of a free man or woman carried a fine of a hundred *staters*, while the same offence committed against a serf was punishable by a mere five-*stater* fine. The laws also cover subjects such as property and inheritance rights, the status of children of mixed marriages (that is, between free people and serfs) and the control of trade.

The panels on which the law is inscribed are now incorporated into the round Odeion, which was erected under Trajan in around 100 AD and rebuilt in the third or fourth century (the brick terrace which protects the inscriptions from the elements is modern). The Odeion is just the latest incarnation of a series of buildings on this site in which the code has apparently always been preserved – obviously, this was a city which valued its own history. When they were discovered in the late nineteenth century, these ruins were entirely buried under eroded soil washed down from the hills behind.

In a small pavilion backing onto the site's **cafeteria** there's an impressive collection of **statuary**, demonstrating the high standard of work being achieved here during the city's halcyon days.

West of the river: the acropolis

Beside the fenced site, the **river** runs by an abandoned medieval mill and on the far bank you can see a much larger **theatre**, in rather poor repair, set against the hillside. In Roman times, the river ran through a culvert here and you could have walked straight across; nowadays, you have to go back to the road-bridge to explore this area.

The guardians at the site will provide information on exploring the outlying areas, and will give directions to the easiest path up to the **acropolis** on the hilltop above the river. Hardly anyone makes the hike up there, shying away from such a stiff climb in the heat, but the ruins are surprisingly impressive, with Roman defensive **walls** and a building known as the *kástro* (though apparently not a castle) still standing to a height of six metres in places. The lesser remains are among the earliest on the site and include scant relics of a Greek **temple** that was later converted to a church. From this hilltop vantage point, you also get a fine overview of the layout of Górtys and the ongoing excavations, and it's possible to trace the line of the aqueducts coming in from the north.

With **your own transport**, you can reach the acropolis by following the road across the river towards Míres and Festós, taking a fork on the right signed "to the Acropolis of Górtys". This road goes through the village of **Ambeloúzos**, where you should take a right turn immediately after the village sign. The route then climbs and you shortly need to make a right turn along a road signed to Apomarmá and Gérgeri. Soon, a sign on the right will alert you to the acropolis, visible off to the right and a five-minute walk away uphill.

Míres

MÍRES, a bustling farming town 6km west of Górtys, is the transport and commercial centre for the area. There's a lively radio station, Radio Míres, supplying music and news to the whole of the Messará from its base just off the main square (more a widening of the street than a square), along with scores of places to eat and drink, numerous banks and ATMs, and cheap **rooms** if you happen to be stranded between buses. The bus station is at the west end of town: you may need to change here for Léndas and Mátala on the coast, Zarós and Kamáres in the mountains, Timbáki and Ayía Galíni, or Réthimnon. Right by the bus station there's a café with internet access and a couple of small tavernas, and heading from here to the centre of town, some 200m away, you'll pass several more including an excellent bakery, *Iris*, with sandwiches and pies, and the self-explanatory *Pizzeria Roma*. Around the main square itself are many more cafés (some with Internet) and fast-food places, while about 150m further east along the main road is the *Hotel Olympic* (☎28920 22777; ②), characterless but clean and economical with en-suite rooms. On Saturday mornings, the town is enlivened by a busy **market**.

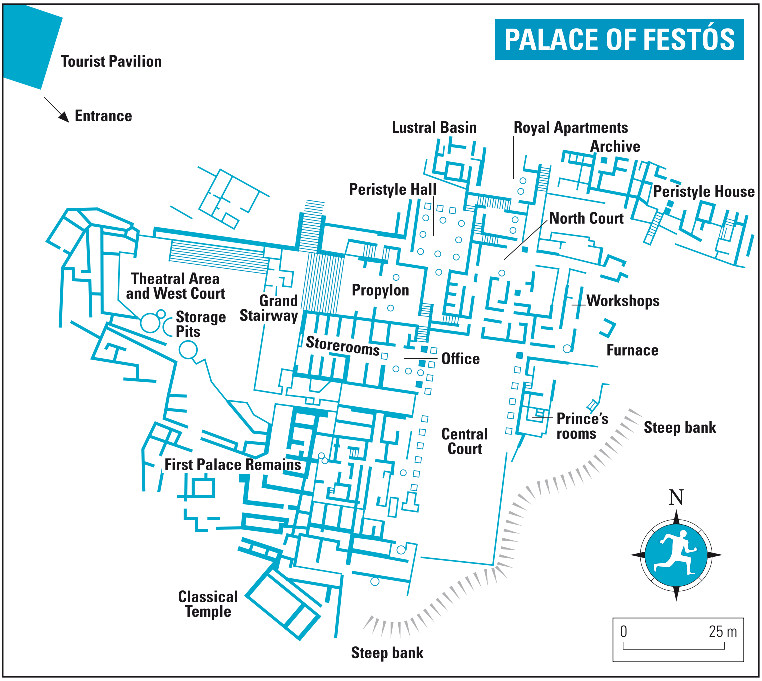
Festós

In a wonderfully scenic location on a ridge at the eastern end of the Messará plain, with fine views towards the encircling mountains, the palace of **FESTÓS** (daily 8am–7pm; €4, joint ticket with Ayía Triádha €6, under 18s and EU students free) and its neighbouring "summer palace", the charming **Ayía Triádha** (see p.145), are Minoan sites ranking second only to Knossós on the island.

Bus services to Festós are excellent, with some nine a day (fewer on Sun) from Iráklion (the last heads back there just before the site closes). Five of these continue to Mátala, and there are also services direct to Ayía Galíni (or head back to Míres for other connections). All buses stop right by the parking area. As you enter the site there's a **Tourist Pavilion** that serves drinks and food in addition to selling the usual postcards, books and souvenirs. If you want to stay nearby, **rooms** can be found in nearby villages such as Vóri (p.147) and Kamiláni (p.151) and along the road towards Mátala, as well as in Míres or Timbáki: a major bonus of doing so is that if you get to the site early you may have a couple of hours of relative peace before the coaches start rolling in, some time after 10am. Áyios Ioánnis (p.147), not far way on the Mátala road, makes a good **lunch stop** after or between sites.

Some history

The palace of **Festós** was excavated by Federico Halbherr (also responsible for the early work on Górtys) at almost exactly the same time as Evans was working at Knossós. The style of the excavations, however, could hardly have been more different. Here, reconstruction has been kept to an absolute minimum, to the


PALACE OF FESTÓS
Tourist Pavilion
Entrance
Lustral Basin
Royal Apartments
Archive
Peristyle Hall
Peristyle House
North Court
Theatral Area and West Court
Grand Stairway
Propylon
Storage Pits
Workshops
Storerooms
Office
Furnace
Prince's rooms
Steep bank
Central Court
First Palace Remains
N
Classical Temple
Steep bank
0
25 m

approval of most traditional archeologists: it's all bare foundations, and walls that scarcely rise above ground level.

As at Knossós, most of what survives is what the excavators termed the **Second Palace**, rebuilt after its destruction around 1700 BC and occupied until ca.1450 BC. But at Festós, the first palace was used as a foundation for the second, and much of its well-preserved floor plan has been uncovered by the excavations. Fascinating as these superimposed buildings are for the experts, they can make Festós confusing for casual visitors to interpret.

Certainly it's a very different experience from visiting Knossós, and it may help to have seen the reconstructions there first. Nonetheless, the stunning setting, overlooked by the snowcapped peaks of Psiloritís and with magnificent views east across the plain, make it easy to see why a palace was built here. Although there are significant differences between Festós and the other palaces, these are in the end outweighed by the multitude of similarities. The rooms are set about a great central courtyard, with an external court on the west side and a theatral area north of this; the domestic apartments are, as usual, slightly apart from the public and formal ones; there are the same lines of storage magazines and pits for grain; and on the east side are workshops for the palace craftsmen. While no traces of frescoes were found, this doesn't imply that the palace wasn't luxurious: the materials (marble, alabaster, gypsum) were of the highest quality, there were sophisticated drainage and bathing facilities, and remains suggest a large and airy dining hall on the upper floors overlooking the court. Bear in mind, as you explore, that part of the palace is missing: there must have been more outbuildings on the south side of the site, where erosion has worn away the edge of the ridge and a corner of the central court itself has collapsed.

Entering the site: the West Court and Grand Stairway

You enter the palace from above, approaching the northwest corner of the complex through the Upper Court. Step down first into the **West Court** and integral **Theatral Area**. As at Knossós, there are raised walkways leading across the courtyard, and here one of them runs right up the steps that form the seats of the Theatral Area (accorded this title by archeologists who supposed it was used for viewing some kind of performance or spectacle). On the west side of the court are circular walled pits, probably for storing grain. The West Court itself is a rare survival from the original palace; the main walkway leads not up the stairs into the new palace but past them and into the entrance to the old palace. From there, much of the facade of the old palace can be seen as a low wall in front of the Grand Stairway which leads into the newer building. When the palace stood, of course, this would not have been apparent; then, the court was filled with rubble and levelled (though not paved) at the height of the bottom step of the stairway.

The **Grand Stairway** was a fitting approach to Festós, a superbly engineered flight of twelve shallow stone steps, 14m wide. Some of the steps are actually carved from the solid rock of the hill, and each is slightly convex in order to improve the visual impact. This remarkable architectural innovation anticipated similar subtleties of the Parthenon at Athens by twelve centuries. The entrance facade was no doubt equally impressive – you can still see the base of the pillar which supported the centre of the doorway – but it's hard to imagine from what actually survives. Once inside, the first few rooms seem somewhat cramped: this may have been deliberate, either for security purposes, to prevent a sudden rush, or as a ploy to enhance the larger, lighter spaces beyond. At the end would have been a blank wall, open to the sky, and a small door to the right which led out onto stairs down towards the Central Court. Standing in the entrance area now, you can look down over the **storerooms**, and going down the stairs, you can get closer to them through a larger room that once served as an office. Exposed here is a storeroom from the old palace, with a giant jar still in place and another barred cellar to the right lined with more amphorae. At the far end, more *píthoi* stand in a room apparently used to store olive oil or other liquids; there's a stool to stand on while reaching in and a basin to catch spillage, while the whole floor slopes towards a hole in which slops would have collected.

The Central Court and Royal Apartments

From the stores "office", quite an elaborate room, you pass into the **Central Court**, which is by far the most atmospheric area of the palace. In this great paved court, with its scintillating **views**, there is a rare sense of Festós as it must have once been. Look north from here in the direction of the Psiloritis range and you can make out a black smudge to the right of a saddle between the two peaks. This marks the entrance to the Kamáres Cave (see p.267), a shrine sacred to the Minoans and the source of the great hoard of elaborate Kamáres ware pottery now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum. Even without the views – which would have been blocked by the two storeys to either side when the palace was standing – the courtyard remains impressive. Its north end, in particular, is positively and unusually grand: the doorway, flanked by half-columns and niches (possibly for sentries) covered in painted plaster, can be plainly made out. To the left as you face this are a couple of *píthoi* (left there by the excavators) and a stepped stone that some claim was an altar, or perhaps a block from which athletes would jump onto bulls. The equally unprovable counter-theory has it, more prosaically, as a base for a flowerpot.

Along each of the lengthy sides of the courtyard ran a covered **portico** or verandah, the bases of whose supports are still visible. In the southwest corner are various rooms which probably had religious functions; beyond these, and hard to distinguish from them, are parts of the old palace which are mostly fenced off. Also here, right at the edge of the site, are the remains of a **Greek temple** of the Classical era, evidence that the site was occupied long after the Minoans and the destruction of the palace.

Heading up through the grand north door – notice the holes for door pivots and the guardroom just inside – a corridor leads through the **North Court** toward the **Royal Apartments**. These have been covered and shut off to prevent damage from people walking through, and it's hard to see a great deal of the queen's rooms, or the king's rooms behind them. Above the king's quarters is a large **Peristyle Hall**, a colonnaded courtyard much like a cloister, open in the centre. On the north side, this courtyard was open to take in the view of Psiloritis: it must have been a beautiful place, and perhaps also one of some religious significance. Staircases linked the hall directly with the Royal Apartments (and the **lustral basin** on the north edge of the king's rooms); nowadays it's easier to approach from the palace entrance, turning left up the stairs from the Propylon.

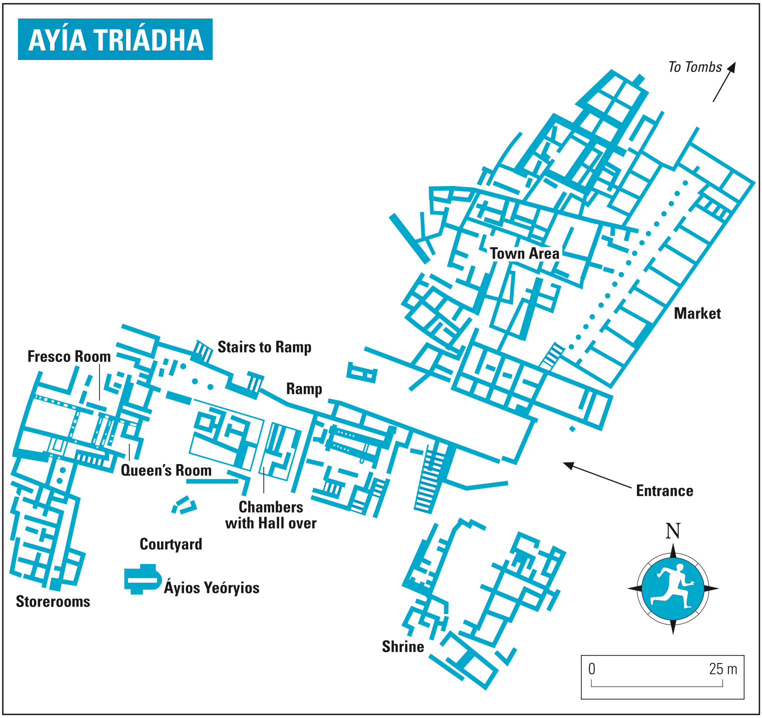
Palace dependencies

Continuing past the royal quarters on the other side, you come to the dependent buildings on the northeast flank of the palace, which almost certainly predate much of the palace itself. Among the first of these is the so-called **Archive**, where the famous **Festós Disc** (see p.92) was discovered in one of a row of mud-brick boxes. A little further on is the **Peristyle House**, probably a private home, with an enclosed yard similar in design to the Peristyle Hall. From here, stairs lead back down to the level of the Central Court, into the area of the palace **workshops**. In the centre of another large courtyard are the remains of a furnace, probably used for metalworking or as a kiln. The small rooms roundabout were the workshops, perhaps even the homes, of the craftsmen. As you walk back to the central court, another suite of rooms – usually described as the **Prince's Rooms** – lies on your left, boasting its own small peristyle hall.

Ayía Triádha

AYÍA TRIÁDHA (daily May–Sept 10am–7.30pm; Oct–April 8.30am–3pm; €4, joint ticket with Festós €6) lies about 3km west of Festós on the far side of the hill, an easy drive or a walk of about 45 minutes by a well-signed road around the south slope. The site – discovered and excavated at the turn of the twentieth century by the Italian School under Federico Halbherr – remains something of an enigma. Nothing exists to compare it with, in what is known of Minoan Crete, nor does it appear in any records; even the name has had to be borrowed from a nearby chapel.

In sharp contrast with unadorned Festós, Ayía Triádha has provided some of the most delicate Minoan **artworks** found. From this site came the three vases of carved black steatite – the "Harvesters Vase", the "Boxer Vase" and the "Chieftain Cup" – on display in the Iráklion Archeological Museum (see p.93), as well as some of the finest works in the Fresco Hall there, including the unique painted sarcophagus. Yet again, the ruins enjoy a magnificent hillside location, looking out over the Gulf of Messará. The modern view takes in the coastal plain, with Timbáki military airstrip in the foreground, but in Minoan times the sea would have come right up to the base of the hill. Despite this beauty and wealth, Ayía Triádha is clearly not a construction on the same scale as the great palaces: the most commonly accepted explanation is that it was some kind of royal villa or summer retreat, but it may equally have



been the home of an important prince or noble, or a building of special ceremonial significance.

You approach the site from the **car park** above it. Predictably, the remains, in which buildings of several eras are jumbled, are confused and confusing. This matters little, however, for it is the atmosphere of Ayía Triádha that really makes the place – the absence of crowds, the beauty of the surroundings and the human scale of the villa, with its multitude of little stairways and paved corridors between rooms.

The site

To your left as you climb down are the bare ruins of a Minoan house older than most of the other remains (the villa was broadly contemporary with the new palace at Festós), and beyond them a **shrine** which contained a frescoed floor and walls now on show in the Iráklion Archeological Museum. If you keep to the higher ground here, you come into the courtyard of the villa, perhaps the best place to get an impression of its overall layout. The L-shaped building enclosed the courtyard only on its north and west sides, and the north side is further muddled by a much later hall – apparently a Mycenaean megaron – built over it. To the south of the courtyard is the early fourteenth-century chapel of **Áyios Yeóryios** (key available from the ticket office), in which there are fragments of some fine frescoes.

The **Royal Villa** now lies mostly below the level of the courtyard, but in Minoan times it would not have appeared this way: the builders made use of the natural slope to create a split-level construction, and entrances from the court would have led directly into upper levels above those you see today. The finest of the rooms were those in the corner of the "L", looking out over the sea; here, the best of the frescoes were found, including the famous stalking cat – now preserved in the Iráklion Archeological Museum. The quality of workmanship can still be appreciated in these chambers with their alabaster-lined walls and gypsum floors and benches. Beside them to the south is a small group of storerooms with a number of *píthoi* still in place; some bear scorch marks from the great fire which destroyed the palace about 1450 BC. From the hall and terrace out front, you can walk around the **ramp** that runs beneath the north side of the villa. The Italian excavators named this the *Rampa al Mare*, and it seems that it would have once run down to the sea.

Follow it the other way instead and you can head down to the lower part of the site, the **town area**. By far the most striking aspect of this is the **market**, a row of stores which are once again unique in Minoan architecture. The stores, identically sized and fronted by a covered portico, run in a line down the hill; in front of them is an open space and, across that, the houses of the town. There's only one problem with the easily conjured image of the Minoan populace milling around the market while their rulers looked benignly on from above: this area apparently dates only from the declining years of the Minoan culture and is contemporary not with the villa, but with the megaron erected over it. Beyond the stores (and outside the fence) lies the **Cemetery**, where remains of two tholos tombs and many other graves were found, including the one containing the Ayía Triádha sarcophagus.

Around Festós

Continuing **west** from Festós towards Ayía Galíni or Réthimnon, the final stretch of the Messará plain, with its acres of polythene greenhouses and burgeoning concrete sprawl, must be among the ugliest places in Crete. **Timbáki** may also be the island's drabbest town. It's a sizeable place, which means there are cafés and restaurants along the main street, stores and banks, and even a couple of hotels, but there's no reason to stay longer than you have to. Just beyond, a turning leads to **Kókkinos**

Pírgos on the coast. Here, too, plastic and concrete are the overwhelming images, and the place is barely redeemed by a plentiful supply of cheap **rooms** and the lack of crowds on its none-too-beautiful beach. The more inviting beaches in this area are in and around the developed resort of **Mátala**, south of Festós (see p.148).

Inland: Vóri and the Museum of Cretan Ethnology

The road **north** from Festós confirms the rule that on Crete all you have to do is turn off the main road to escape into almost another world. **VÓRI** lies only a kilometre north of the road leading to Festós and, despite being quite a big place, is a pleasant working village almost entirely off the beaten track. It even has places offering **rooms**, including the *Pension Margit* (☎28920 91129; ②), with simple en-suite rooms, and *Portokali Studios* (☎28920 91188; ②), with attractive air-conditioned studio apartments with kitchen and TV: both are on the edge of the village – look for the signs. A couple of *kafenía* on the square itself serve up *mezédhes*. That some tourists do come here is largely due to the outstanding **Museum of Cretan Ethnology** (April–Oct daily 10am–6pm; €3), advertised by large signs along the main road. Hidden behind the church, it's worth seeking out for a comprehensive survey of traditional country life in Crete, and though much copied it's still probably the best example of this type of museum on Crete. The collection is a miscellany of agricultural implements, building tools and materials, domestic utensils, furniture, pottery, musical instruments, weaving and embroidery, all well labelled and fascinating. There are sections on the production of olive oil, winemaking and the distillation of *raki*, as well as a display of the myriad herbs and medicinal plants sought out by Cretans since ancient times. A collection of baskets is especially interesting, the various designs including beehives, eel traps, cheese-drainers, animal muzzles and snail containers.

If you're heading for the Amári Valley and Réthimnon from Vóri, you can spurn the main road and take a lovely, climbing drive via Kalohorafitís and Grigoría to **Kamáres** (see p.267).

South to Mátala

The road **south** from Festós passes the Ayía Triádha turn-off and soon approaches the village of **ÁYIOS IOÁNNIS**. Just before the village, the picturesque roadside *Taverna Ayios Ioannis* serves excellent **food** at tables set under a shady vine trellis; *kounéli*, the house speciality of charcoal-grilled rabbit, is recommended, and the lamb is tasty, too, but you should be aware that at busy times service tends to be slow.

Be sure to take in the tiny, drum-domed church of **Áyios Pávlos**, 500m beyond the taverna in a walled cemetery on the left side of the road. Encircled by cypresses, this delightful church is one of the oldest on the island with sections dating from the pre-Christian era, and perhaps part of a Roman shrine to a water deity focused on the **well** at the back of the graveyard. The area to the rear of the church is the most ancient, with the dome probably added in the fourteenth century and the narthex, or porch – with its Venetian pointed arches – in the sixteenth. Inside (the church is normally open), some interesting **frescoes** are dated by a frieze to 1303 and have images of the Evangelists Matthew and Luke, as well as a lurid representation of the punishments of Hell with souls being molested by serpents. This is one of the very few churches on Crete dedicated to St Paul, who was none too taken with the islanders, describing them in one of his epistles as "liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons". To the side of the church, a charnel house contains the (visible) bones of corpses removed from the nearby tombs after a period of time to "free up" space.

Right opposite the chapel a minor road heads west towards Kamilári (p.151) and Kalamáki (p.152), while the main route continues south towards Mátala.

Mátala and around

MÁTALA has much the best known of the **beaches** in the south of Iráklion province, and was once one of the chief ports of Górtys. You may still meet people who will assure you that, with its cave-dwelling hippy community, this is *the* travellers' beach on Crete, but that's now history – and bears about as much relation to modern reality as Mátala's role in legend as the place where Zeus swam ashore in the guise of a bull with Europa on his back. The entry to the village should prepare you for what to expect: a couple of kilometres of new hotels, "Welcome to Mátala" signs and extensive car-parking areas line the roadsides all the way into town. It does get better, and development is still relatively small-scale, but the town never feels anything other than touristy: tour-bus arrivals in the afternoon take up every inch of sand, and prices (for rooms especially) are relatively high. On the plus side, Mátala boasts a spectacular **beach**: a curving swathe of sand tucked under the cliff in which you'll find the notorious **caves**; the crowds are relatively young, the atmosphere is boisterous and you'll never be short of somewhere to enjoy a cocktail at sunset.

The caves started it all. Nobody knows quite who started the caves, which are entirely artificial, but it seems likely that they were first hollowed out as Roman or early Christian **tombs**: they have since been so often reused and added to that it is virtually impossible to tell. The cliff in which they are carved, an outcrop of compacted sand, is soft enough to allow surprisingly elaborate decor: some caves have carved windows and doorways as well as built-in benches or beds (which may originally have been grave slabs), while others are mere scooped-out hollows. Local people inhabited the caves, on and off, for centuries, and during the war, they made a handy munitions dump, but it was in the 1960s that they really became famous, attracting a large and semi-permanent foreign community. Name a famous hippy, and there'll be someone who'll claim that they lived here, too – the most frequently mentioned are Cat Stevens, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell ("they're playin' that scratchy rock and roll beneath the Matala moon" crooned the latter on her 1970s album, *Blue*). It has, however, been a very long time since the caves were cleared, and nowadays they're a fenced-off **archeological site** (April–Sept daily 10am–7pm; €2), open by day to visitors but searched by the police – and floodlit – every night.

The beach below the caves is the focus for most of the town's activity, and during the day everyone hangs out either on the sand or in the tavernas overlooking it. The swimming is great – if surprisingly rough when the wind blows – with gently shelving sand in the centre, underwater remains of the Roman port around the base of the rocks on both sides (watch out for sea urchins), and multicoloured fish everywhere. However, you should be aware that **dangerous currents** are prevalent on this stretch of coast and red warning flags – which should be heeded – are posted when swimming is unsafe.

If the crowds on the town beach get too much, you can head south along "Hotels and Rent Rooms" street (see opposite) towards the hill, where a track becomes obvious; it can be quite hard going in parts, climbing over the rocks behind town, and you may end up scrambling over loose scree on the way down, but after about twenty minutes you'll reach another excellent stretch of sand known locally as **Red Beach**, which is usually half-empty. It has curious dark reddish-brown sand and wonderfully clear water. On the way, you pass more caves, many of which are inhabited through the summer; indeed, when you know where to look, it turns out that there are a number of cave dwellings around, all some way from the village, with the exact whereabouts of the better ones a closely guarded secret. In high season, and weather permitting, there are also boat trips to Red Beach and other strands such as Áyio (p.153) or Palm Beach (p.289).

△ View from the caves at Mátala

Practicalities

For all practical purposes, Mátala consists of a single street, the continuation of the main road into town as it curves round behind the beach. The market and many of the places to eat lie to the right, between the road and the beach, and the "old town", such as it is, is crammed against the rocks to the left. Almost every other practical need is easily taken care of: **car** and **bike rental**, **ATMs** and **currency exchange** are all around the main square or up the main street, and there are also a couple of **travel agents**, among which Monza (☎28920 45359) is reliable and where you'll get a ten-percent discount on car, motorbike and scooter hire with this guide. A helpful source of **information** is the **bookshop** Kadianakis, near the main square, which stocks foreign newspapers and a selection of English fiction. **Internet** access is possible at *Cafe Zafiria*, next door to here, or at the nearby *Kafeneio* (see p.150). The covered **market** still has a couple of authentic stalls selling fruit and veg, but these are rapidly being displaced by souvenir stores, embroidery and beachwear stalls, and general tat.

Accommodation

Finding a **room** should be no problem with so many alternatives, and travel agencies can help if you can't face the trawl. Out of season, you may well be in a position to bargain, but Mátala does have a very long season: it's a popular Easter destination for Greek families. Most of the options below are on a street to the left as you enter town signed "Hotels and Rent Rooms", which is almost entirely lined with purpose-built accommodation places. These are very conveniently located – alleys behind places on the right-hand side lead straight into the centre of town, which means that places on the left may be slightly quieter (not that noise is a major problem here). There's also a **campsite** above the beach car park, *Matala Camping* (☎28920 45340), which has shady tamarisk trees and is fine if you like camping on sand. If you don't mind being further from the action, then *Camping Kommos* (☎28920 45596) is a better site, with an on-site swimming pool and taverna; it's located off the seaward side of the road, roughly halfway between Pitsídhia and Mátala. Buses stop nearby.

Pension Iliaki Hotel Street Ⓣ28920 45110, Ⓦwww.matala-holidays.gr. Recently modernised a/c rooms and larger apartments with kitchens, on the quieter side of the street. ❷

Matala View Pension Hotel Street Ⓣ28920 45114, Ⓦwww.matala-apartments.com. Rooms with kitchenette, balcony and fans, as well as some larger apartments on the quiet side of Hotel Street. ❷

Hotel Nikos Hotel Street Ⓣ28920 45375, Ⓦwww.interkriti.net/hotel/matala/nikos/. One of the best on Hotel Street, with en-suite rooms around a charming plant-filled courtyard; rooms vary in price and quality (some a/c for extra charge), so check out more than one. ❸

Pension Silvia Hotel Street Ⓣ28920 45127, Ⓦwww.sylvia.gr. A friendly welcome, with more en-suite a/c rooms with fridge. ❷

Hotel Sofia Hotel Street Ⓣ28920 45134, Ⓔhotel-sofia-matala@yahoo.gr. Friendly and slightly old-fashioned atmosphere, though some rooms are recently built. Again, quality and price vary: most have a/c and fridge. Some of the most tempting rooms facing towards the town square can be noisy. Prices include breakfast. ❸

Hotel Zafiria On the main street as you enter Mátala Ⓣ28920 45366, Ⓦwww.zafiria-matala.com. A large comfortable, modern hotel – a little bland – with a/c en-suite rooms with balcony, and a small pool. Includes breakfast. ❸

Eating, drinking and nightlife

There's no shortage of **places to eat** in Mátala, with cafés, pizza and fast food around the square, and a line of tavernas – with very similar menus – fringing the bay. Competition helps keep prices reasonable. The smallest and least pretentious of the sea-front tavernas is *Skala*, with sea-fresh fish and superb views across to the cliffs. It is at the very far end of town above the tiny harbour, and is approached through the bar *Karnagio* – watch your footing across the cliffs, especially on the way back. *Taverna Eleni* is another reliable choice overlooking the beach. In town, *Corali* and *Antonis*, around the square, are good, while *Minos Palace*, close to the *Hotel Zafiria*, has a particularly fancy seafront terrace. Almost opposite the same hotel, *Kafeneio* is a stylish bar which makes a pleasant breakfast venue, does cocktails in the evening and offers **Internet** access in an upstairs gallery. *Kreta-Bar*, on the square, also serves excellent breakfasts. Takeaway food and ingredients for picnics can be found in the stalls of the "market".

The chief **entertainment** in the evening is watching the invariably spectacular sunset; almost every bar and restaurant has a west-facing terrace. Otherwise nightlife is generally low-key, conducted in numerous bars which gradually turn up the music as the evening wears on. Most of the livelier places are at the southern end of the bay, including *Port Side*, a cocktail bar with an enviable beachside location, and *Marinero* and *Tommy's Music Bar*, which get lively later on. *Cafe Kantari*, on the square, is another place where people gather after dark.

Around Mátala: Pitsídhia and Kalamáki

An alternative base to Mátala, marginally cheaper and certainly more peaceful, **Pitsídhia** sprawls around the main road about 5km inland. This is already a well-used option, so far from unspoilt, but it's a pleasant Greek village with plenty of rooms, lively places to eat and an affable young international crowd. Head up the hill away from the main road for more peace and atmosphere – there seem to be dozens of rooms places and tavernas up here: *Sofia Apartments* (Ⓣ28920 45365; ❷), on the main street not far from the central *platía*, has simple, modern, en-suite rooms, while *Eva and Nikos*, on the square, serves excellent food.

Kommós

The archeological site of ancient **Kommós**, a Minoan harbour town which was probably the main port for Festós and Ayía Triádha, lies on the coast west of Pitsídhia, at the southern end of a sandy shore which extends right up to Kalamáki (p.152). A number of sandy tracks lead down there. The northwesterly winds that often lash the beach and fill the sea with whitecaps here would suggest that this was not the best place for a harbour, but about 350m offshore an ancient reef (still visible on calmer days) provided shelter. The sea level would have been a couple of metres lower in Minoan times, making the reef a far more substantial bulwark. On calm days, the beach here is very pleasant indeed, with shade and a seasonal taverna.

Sir Arthur Evans was the first to report signs of Minoan occupation at Kommós, but real excavation started only twenty years ago when Joseph Shaw began digging, funded by the American School of Classical Studies. Though it's clear that this is a major site, the excavations are fenced off and not officially open to visitors. In July and August you may be able to get the key to the site by visiting the site excavation centre in Pitsídhia. Look for the *Acropolis Taverna* on the main road and, 50m up a narrow lane opposite this, a blue gate on the right bears the sign Kommós Excavations House.

There are three main **excavation areas**, to the north, centre and south, none of them more than a stone's throw behind the beach. The **northern area**, on a low hill close to the sea, contains domestic dwellings, among which is a large house (on the south side) with a paved court and a limestone winepress. The **central group** – behind a retaining wall to prevent subsidence – has houses from the New Palace era, with well-preserved walls and evidence, in the fallen limestone slabs, of the earthquake of around 1700 BC which caused much destruction here. A rich haul of intact pottery was found in this area, much of it in the brightly painted Kamáres style.

The most remarkable finds to date, however, came in the **southern sector** where what you see is partly confused by being overlaid by a Classical Greek sanctuary. Minoan remains here include a fine stretch of **limestone roadway**, 3m wide and more than 60m long, heading away inland, no doubt towards Ayía Triádha and Festós. The road is rutted from the passage of ox-drawn carts and would also have been pounded by the feet of countless Minoan mariners. Note the drainage channel on its northern side. To the south of the road, one building contains the longest stretch of **Minoan wall** on the island: over 50m of dressed stone. Some of the cut blocks in this wall (many well over three metres in length) are among the largest found in Minoan Crete. The function of this enormous building isn't known but it could conceivably have been a palace, or it may have had a storage purpose connected with the port. Some of the nearby dwellings to the north of the roadway were also of elaborate construction, and a substantial number of fresco fragments unearthed by the excavators hint at sumptuous interior decorations. Just south of here was another large building (now partly overlaid by a later Greek structure – probably a warehouse), 30m long and 35m wide, divided into five sections with its seaward end open to the sea. This was a shipshed or **dry dock** where vessels were stored out of the water during the winter (or non-sailing) season.

Kamilári

A couple of kilometres north of Pitsídhia, a road heads off through the olive groves towards the attractive hill village of **Kamilári**, which can also be reached by a turning opposite the church at Áyios Pávlos church. A large number of houses here have been renovated by foreign owners – predominantly German – and there are plenty of tempting **rooms**. At the road junction just below the village, *Studios Pelekanos* (②) has good-value studio rooms with air-conditioning and kitchenette, while on the hill as you climb towards the village, the very welcoming, child-friendly *Apartments Ambeliotissa* (②) has excellent air-conditioned studios and apartments in and around a house in its own grounds, with small pool and playground. They're under the same management (ⓣ & ⓕ 28920 42690, ⓣ 69773

11130, Ⓦwww.ambeliotissa.com) and the owner also hires out **mountain bikes**, offers **Internet** access and will collect guests from the bus stop at the Festós site with advance warning. In the village itself, the elegant *Apartments Festias* (Ⓣ28920 42819, Ⓦwww.southerncrete.gr/festias; ❸) has en-suite studios with terrace and fridge around a courtyard; they also have some villas to rent nearby with garden and pool. *Xenonas Apartments* (Ⓣ & Ⓕ 28920 42811, Ⓣ69443 91974, Ⓦwww.xenonas.com; ❸), is a similarly classy renovation of an old building, with studios with kitchenettes. The cheapest rooms are probably at *Pension Anna* (Ⓣ28920 52346; ❶), just off the main square, which has en-suite rooms with kitchenette. There are numerous bars and restaurants some of which, thanks no doubt to the ex-pat community, are surprisingly sophisticated.

Just outside Kamilári is an early **Minoan tomb**, one of the oldest and best-preserved in Crete. You'll see signs to it from the junction below the village, leading you through olive groves to the fenced hilltop site, though it makes sense to get directions locally, as the signs often seem to be moved, leaving you stranded in the middle of nowhere. Dating from about 1900 BC, the tomb was a circular structure with a large dome, inside which communal burials took place, whilst cult rituals were carried out in adjoining rooms. The stone walls still stand two metres high in parts; important clay models depicting worship at a shrine and a circular group of dancers unearthed here are now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum.

Kalamáki

Three kilometres from Kamilári, **Kalamáki** is a small beach resort with a rather unfinished look. Though not particularly attractive, Kalamáki does have a large uncrowded, windswept beach, plenty of good-value accommodation and a pleasantly backwater atmosphere. In practical terms there's just about everything you could need, including several car and bike rental companies (try Monza Travel, Ⓣ28920 45692), a bakery, and plenty of shops.

Along the sea front you'll find a fairly solid line of accommodation, almost all of it purpose-built and very similar – air-conditioned studios with small kitchens and sea views. Places inland are inevitably a little cheaper. Of those with sea views, *Rooms Psiloritis* (Ⓣ28920 45693, Ⓕ28920 45249; ❷), set back a little from the northern end of the main beach, is great value – a rambling, slightly ramshackle place with numerous sea-view terraces and plain en-suite rooms with fridge. Nearby, slightly more expensive but right on the sea front, are *Rooms Nefeli* (Ⓣ28920 45211; ❷), with air-conditioned en-suite rooms with kitchenette, and *Studios Dimitra* (Ⓣ28920 45510, Ⓦwww.studiosdimitra.com; ❷), where air-conditioned studios have kitchenette and TV. At the southern end of town, beachfront *Hotel Alexander* (Ⓣ28920 45195, Ⓦwww.alexander-beach.de; ❸, ❹ for sea view, including breakfast) has air-conditioned balcony rooms with fridge, plus its own restaurant. On the way into the village, the *Hotel Philharmonie* (Ⓣ28920 45797, Ⓦwww.kalamaki.net; ❸ including breakfast) has air-conditioned studios and apartments with an excellent garden pool behind. For **food**, it's hard to look beyond the sea-front tavernas, especially as eating there will allow you to use their loungers and umbrellas. All have standard Greek menus with an emphasis on fish. *Aristides*, at the northern end, *Sunset*, centrally, and *Taverna Yiorgos*, to the south, are all good bets.

Inland from Mátala: Moní Odigítrias and the Áyio Gorge

Between Festós and Pitsídhia a number of small roads head west towards the villages of the southern Messará. Here, as indeed throughout this corner of Crete, many properties have been bought by foreigners (Germans especially in this area), and many of these small villages have incongruously fancy villas in their midst.

Nonetheless it's lovely, quiet countryside, enjoyable to drive around, the villages surrounded by their crops of oranges, pomegranates or olives.

Heading north from Pitsídhia, the first turning is towards **Sívas**, a lovely village, but one of the most obviously affected by visitors, largely thanks to the rather bizarrely located *Shivas Village Resort*, a luxury hotel/apartment complex on the far edge of the village. In the heart of Sívas are some very pleasant, simpler rooms places and a couple of good tavernas: if you want to stay, check out *Horiatiko Spiti* (Village House, ☎28920 42004, ⓔhoriatikospiti@yahoo.gr, ④), a converted old house with beautiful, fully equipped studios and duplex apartments. Beyond Sívas you can continue to wander the back roads through villages like **Kousés**, where there are more rooms and places to eat, and on to the large agricultural centre of **Pómbia**, from where you can head south to the coast at Kalí Liménes.

Just beyond Sívas, however, a newly paved road is signed south to Moní Odigítrias and Kalí Liménes. Be warned that while the first half of this road, as far as the monastery, is excellent, the second half is an exceptionally rough, mountainous dirt track: an ordinary car will make it, but only if you're confident driving in these conditions. Even with the new road, **Moní Odigítrias** exudes a powerful sense of isolation, and except on summer weekends it sees few visitors. They make an effort to make those visitors welcome, though, and there's usually someone to show you round this little walled oasis in the midst of the bare mountains: there's a flower-filled courtyard, fifteenth-century icons and frescoes in the church and a horse-powered olive-press, as well as a small collection of ancient agricultural implements and and a crumbling tower to climb.

Opposite the monastery entrance you'll see signs for a track leading south to the **Áyio Gorge**. It's about an hour of pleasant walking from the monastery to the gorge entrance, and a further hour through the gorge to the beach; the ground is rough, but this is otherwise not a difficult hike. You can also reach the gorge from a spot further down the (now unpaved) Kalí Liménes road, about 25 minutes from the gorge entrance. The gorge itself is overgrown with oleander, its steep sides pockmarked with hundreds of caves. The gorge's name ("Holy Gorge") refers to the fact that many of these are said to have been occupied by Christian hermits, especially during the period of the Turkish occupation. One of them, just 250m from the sea, was a site of early Christian worship, later enclosed in the fourteenth- to fifteenth-century church of Áyios Andónios. This is a beautiful building, with an ancient well outside (whose water, sadly, is not drinkable); the cave itself is not visible, locked within the inner sanctum of the church. Finally, the **beach** is ample reward for the walk, an expansive pebble cove with beautifully clear, calm water. Usually it's semi-deserted, though just occasionally you may have the bad luck to coincide with a boat-trip from Mátala.

Léndas and Kalí Liménes

South of the Messará, two more beach resorts beckon – **Léndas** and **Kalí Liménes**. In an undeveloped way, Léndas is quite a busy place. Kalí Liménes, 20km south of Míres, is hardly visited at all, perhaps due to its role as a bunkering station for off-loading oil tankers. If you have your own transport, the roads around here are all passable but mostly very slow: the Asteroússia Hills, which divide the plain from the coast, are surprisingly precipitous and even on the paved roads you have to keep a sharp eye out for sudden patches of mud, potholes and roadworks. The only completely paved routes to the coast here are from Áyii Dhéka or Górtys to Léndas, and from Míres to Kalí Liménes via Pómbia. Both itineraries offer great views back over the Messará plain before toiling on through a quintessentially Cretan mountain landscape, where clumps of violet-flowering wild thyme cling to the verges in early summer, and shepherds slow your progress as they herd their flocks of goats along the road at dusk.

Other than the daily direct Léndas–Iráklion **buses**, public transport is very limited indeed – you'll almost always have to travel via Míres.

Kalí Liménes and around

KALÍ LIMÉNES was an important port in Roman times, the main harbour of Górtys and the place where St Paul put in as a prisoner aboard a ship bound for Rome, in an incident described in the Bible in Acts 27. Paul wanted to stay the winter here, but was overruled by the captain of the ship and the centurion acting as his guard; on setting sail, they were promptly overtaken by a storm, which drove them past Clauda (the island of Gávdhos) and on, eventually, to shipwreck on Malta. Today, Kalí Liménes is once again a major port, for oil tankers this time, which has rather spoilt its chances of becoming a resort. It also has a real end-of-the-road feel, especially out of season, though summer weekends can see crowds of Irákliots descend.

This isolation and loneliness does have a certain appeal, and the constant procession of tankers gives you something to look at as they discharge their loads into tanks on an islet just offshore. There are a few **tavernas** and **rooms** places, of which the pick is the friendly *Taverna Panorama* (May–Oct ☎28920 97517; ②), whose air-conditioned en-suite rooms with fridge enjoy wonderful views over the harbour and whose restaurant features fish caught by the proprietor with his own boat. A couple of small cove beaches are accessible beneath the cliffs to the west – on foot only – while to the east is a long, empty beach where people camp out around the *Taverna Gorgona*. With a full day you could also hike up to Moní Odigítrias and down through the gorge to Áyio beach (p.153), having made arrangements at the harbour for a boat to pick you up at the end.

Lassaia to Platía Perámata, the coast road

Leaving Káli Liménes to the east, a mostly rough, dirt road follows the coast all the way to Léndas. **Lassaia** is just a couple of kilometres out of Káli Liménes, still on a paved road. Tumbling down a hill to a bay with a good sandy beach, this is a village of holiday homes anarchically thrown up after the Greek fashion with little regard for planning or facilities. *Taverna Lassaia* here (☎28920 97477; ②) has spotless air-conditioned rooms with bath, fridge, satellite TV and sea view as well as pretty good food. **Krysóstomos**, in the next bay, also has a *Taverna* with modern rooms and studios (☎28920 97449; ②), overlooking the sea.

Beyond there are plenty more scruffy beaches, but the coast is frequently blighted by plastic greenhouses and there's only one place with any sort of permanent habitation: **Platía Perámata**, a sandy little village with a couple of stores, a few basic rooms and usually the odd camper.

Léndas and around

LÉNDAS has a reputation as a hippy resort, a fishing village where you can hang out by the beach and camp for free. Well, the hippies grew up and now they come back with their families to stay in comfortable rooms and eat at excellent restaurants. For a quiet break, you could hardly choose better: it's still small, low-key and a little alternative, but it's no longer especially cheap, nor the sort of place where campers are welcomed on the beach. Beyond the headland to the west, a kilometre or so along the coast road, there's an enormous kilometre-long stretch of sand named **Ditikós** (or Diskós) **Beach** where old traditions are slower to die out: there are some good taverna/bars here with rooms, and numerous new places being built, but further along you'll still find tents and makeshift shelters providing accommodation down on the shore. This beach is predominantly **nudist**, and largely caters to German tourists (all the menus are in German), as indeed does Léndas itself.

Just above the village, right on the main road as it curls behind, are the remains of **ancient Levín** (or Leben; Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm). This was an important centre of healing, with an *Asklepion* sited by a spring of therapeutic waters – at its height, from the third century BC onward, the sanctuary maintained an enormous temple and was a major centre of pilgrimage. The ruins spread over an extensive area and include the remains of a temple and of a bath complex with tunnels and arches through which the water once flowed. Above all, there's a lovely third-century BC Hellenistic black, red and white pebble mosaic (beneath a canopy) depicting a mythical creature half horse, half sea monster. Adjacent to the site are the more substantial remains of an early Christian basilica, with a much smaller eleventh-century chapel still standing in their midst.

The **beach** in Léndas itself is small and grey: for better alternatives you can either take the obvious path around the headland from the western end of the town beach to Ditikós, or head east, where a rough path or a dirt track (signed from the bend on the road) will take you towards **Loutrá**, a bay 5km to the east with a decent beach and a taverna. There are several other small beaches with seasonal tavernas along the way, and from Loutrá you could take a more ambitious hike, 6km inland up the scenic **Trakhoúla gorge** to Krótos. From here you can get a bus (check the times in the village before leaving) or take a taxi the ten kilometres back to Léndas.

Practicalities

On the outskirts, Léndas is still endearingly ramshackle: arrive by bus and you'll be dropped off in a sandy yard on the east side of the village which also serves as a car park for those who drive – from here, a number of cobbled paths lead down towards the beach and the village's central *platía*. Most of the facilities you'll need are located on the square, including a couple of **supermarkets**, **phone box** and **Internet** access at the enterprisingly named *Café Internet*. To change **money** and travellers' cheques, and for **car hire**, head for *Villa Tsapakis* at Ditikós (see accommodation below).

Accommodation

There's accommodation everywhere – most of it in good, modern, studio-style rooms – though in peak season space can be at a premium.

Studios Galini Above the village on the way in Ⓣ28920 95369, Ⓔstudiosgalini@mir.forthnet.gr. Excellent a/c studios with kitchenette and stunning balcony views over the bay. ③

Great Eastern Studios Ditikós Beach Ⓣ69463 52751. Brand-new a/c studios with kitchens, right on the beach not far beyond *Villa Tsapakis*. ②

El Greco Ⓣ28920 95322, Ⓦwww.lentas-elgreco.com. Balcony en-suite rooms directly above the beach – part of the taverna of the same name – though you pay a premium for the position. ③

Lentas Bungalows As you enter the village Ⓣ28920 95270, Ⓕ28920 95222. Good value, considering that you get a sea view, en-suite bungalow and use of a kitchen to prepare your own meals. ③

New Levin Apartments Immediately to the east of the main part of the village Ⓣ28920 95237. Lovely modern a/c studios and apartments, some with two bedrooms and big balconies overlooking the sea. ③

Nikis Rooms Ⓣ28920 95246. Just behind *Zorbas* and *El Greco*, *Nikis* has cheaper rooms, without a/c or views, around a lovely flower-filled courtyard. ①

Villa Tsapakis Ditikós Beach Ⓣ28920 95378, Ⓦwww.villa-tsapakis.gr. En-suite, a/c rooms, circling a plant-filled patio a mere 50m from the sea. ②

Zorbas Ⓣ28920 95228, Ⓦwww.zorbas-lentas.gr. Next door to *El Greco*, and probably better value: balcony en-suite rooms and apartments, most with sea views. ②

Food, drink and nightlife

There are plenty of good tavernas in Léndas serving standard Greek fare, and one exceptional one. This is the *Taverna El Greco* 🏃 (☎28920 95322), with a series of shady terraces above the beach. The food here is mostly standard Greek fare – the day's baked dishes are on display in the kitchen – but cooked with exceptional care using the best local ingredients. There's also an unusually good wine list, with many Cretan bottles. The downside of this is that you can rarely get in without a reservation, and service can at times be painfully slow. Good alternatives include *Zorbas*, right next door, and beachfront *Akti* and *Elpida*, near the main square. Out at Ditikós, both the *Taverna Odysseas* (connected to *Villa Tsapakis*) and *Sifis* (further west) are good bets.

Nightlife is laid back and confined to a handful of bars: the *Pink Panther,* off the square, opens at 9pm, and its music, dancing and cocktails are about as wild as the place gets; *Why Not?*, overlooking the rocks at the beach's western end, is a good place for an aperitif or to lounge over late-night drinks while watching the moon rise over the bay.

Across the south: to Áno Viánnos and Árvi

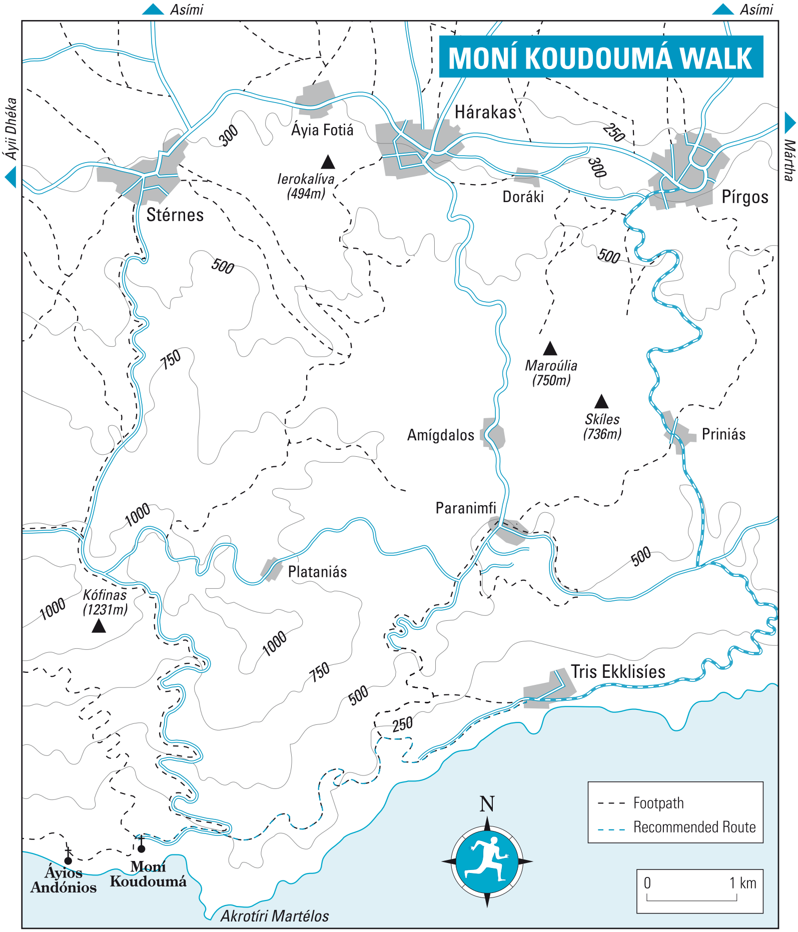
The road **east** across the Messará, from Áyii Dhéka through Asími to Áno Viánnos in the shadow of the **Dhiktean mountains**, is an enjoyably solitary drive through fertile farming country. There's not a great deal to stop for along the way, but there are plenty of solid traditional villages with *kafenía* and places to eat. There's barely any access to the coast before the far east of the province, where there are low-key beach resorts at **Tsoútsouros**, **Keratókambos** and **Árvi**, though for hardy walkers the secluded monastic community at **Moní Koudoumá** is an escapist's dream. Inland, the more substantial village of **Áno Viánnos** has plenty of places for a lunch break and some ancient churches. No buses follow this road, and, in fact, there's very little transport of any kind.

Heading this way from Iráklion, the Knossós road cuts south across the centre of the island, splitting to two alternative routes shortly after Pezá (p.113). The direct route towards Áno Viánnos heads southwest via the featureless farming town of Arkalohóri, along the fringes of the Dhíkti range, joining the west–east route at Mártha. There are a couple of daily buses along this road to Áno Viánnos and Ierápetra. The other route heads south from Houdétsi (p.112), joining the southern road near Pírgos.

Hárakas, Pírgos and Moní Koudoumá

Travelling east from Áyii Dhéka, the main road via **Asími** is fast, scenic and efficient, but if you're in no hurry there's a great deal more to be seen on the quieter roads to the south of this, through farming villages like Vagioniá and Hárakas. **Hárakas** itself is the first with anything very specific to look for: the extraordinary, fortified Moní Áyios Ioánnis, atop a coxcomb of rock rearing up on the edge of the village. You can climb up to admire the views across the plain, though the church itself is usually locked.

If you're feeling adventurous, you can head south from here to the remote **Moní Koudoumá**, nestling in a seaside cove at the foot of a cliff, surrounded by pinewoods. Arriving here is a distinctly end-of-the world experience, and the last remaining monks have only the few elderly women who inhabit the nearby dwell-


MONÍ KOUDOUMÁ WALK
Asími
Asími
Áyii Dhéka
Mártha
Hárakas
Áyia Fotiá
Stérnes
Doráki
Pírgos
Ierokalíva
(494m)
Maroúlia
(750m)
Skíles
(736m)
Amígdalos
Priniás
Paranimfi
Plataniás
Kófinas
(1231m)
Tris Ekklisíes
Áyios
Andónios
Moní
Koudoumá
Akrotíri Martélos
300
250
300
500
500
750
1000
1000
1000
750
500
250
500
N
Footpath
Recommended Route
0
1 km

ings for company. The monks see few visitors, but are extremely welcoming to those that do turn up, and will offer you food and a mattress (take along a sleeping bag if you think you'll be cold) in one of the dormitories set aside for "pilgrims". While the monks will not accept payment for their hospitality, a donation to monastery funds is unlikely to be refused. If you think the magic of the place may persuade you to prolong your stay, you should bring supplies with you. The nights here – illuminated by oil lamps in the absence of mains electricity – are exquisitely serene, broken only by the sound of the sea splashing against the rocks.

If you have a car, you can theoretically drive all the way to the monastery, on an unpaved road south from Stérnes, but the final cliff-face section is extremely scary – not the kind of thing to be attempted lightly in a rented car, on a motorbike or scooter, or in bad weather. Better to walk the final section: the easiest way is to head south from Hárakas on a paved road to the hamlet of **Paranímfi**. Here you could get local directions onto the path that leads directly to the monastery, or continue on a reasonable dirt track to **Trís Ekklisíes**, from where it's 7km or so along a coastal path. There's a taverna with rooms (②) at Trís Ekklisíes. Alternatively, you can hike all the way from Pírgos via Priniás, a distance of some 20km, which should take around four to five hours.

Pírgos is the biggest village in these parts, with plenty of facilities for passing travellers. Should you want to stay, *Rooms Tzaridakis* (☎28930 22238; ②), just off the main street, has simple en-suite rooms, or the comfortable *Hotel Arhontiko* (☎28930 23118; ③), just downhill along the Protória road, adds extras such as air conditioning, TV and kitchenette. Along Pírgos's main street there are a couple of decent **tavernas** and, at the eastern end of the thoroughfare, the fourteenth-century **church** of Áyios Yióryios and Áyios Konstantínos, with some interesting faded frescoes. The key is available from the house (no. 137) to the right of the church gate.

Tsoútsouros

Twelve kilometres east of Pírgos, at Káto Kastelianá, comes the first straightforward route to the sea: 11km of asphalt road winding alarmingly down to **Tsoútsouros**. Despite the drama of the approach, Tsoútsouros itself is not at all attractive; the beach, like those of its neighbours, is narrow, rocky and grey, while the village straggles in an untidy line behind it, with an ugly concrete harbour/marina as a focus. Nonetheless the village is growing into a small resort, and the little bay does have its attractions – it's peaceful, and there are plenty of small, empty beaches to seek out in both directions. On summer weekends, and in the first two weeks of August, it can be very busy with local tourists: out of season, from October to April, most places close. There's no bank or place to change money but there are a couple of **supermarkets**. For **accommodation**, the best places are generally at the eastern end of town, where there's a better beach and it's generally more attractive despite the new development. Among the modern places here, all with air conditioning, sea views and similar prices (far lower out of season) are *Mouratis* (☎28910 92244; ③), a large place with rooms, studios and apartments; *Phaedra Apartments* (☎28910 92311; ③); and very welcoming *Zorbas* (open year-round, weekends only in Dec and Jan; ☎28910 92277, ⓔzorbas-k@hol.gr; ③), for en-suite rooms with fridge and kettle. In town by the harbour, the *San Georgio Hotel* (☎28910 92233; ②) has simpler balcony rooms with fridge and sea view but no air conditioning. For **food**, these last two, *Zorbas* and *San Georgio*, also have Tsoútsouros's best tavernas: *Inatos*, towards the western end, is also reliable, and *Petra & Fos* makes a welcome change, with good pizzas from a wood-fired oven and a comfortable café with breakfast, fresh juices and cocktails – you'll find it at the heart of things where the road from the mountains meets the sea.

If you are after complete isolation, head east along the coast road for a couple of kilometres, where *Apartments Kaboula* (☎28950 51407 or ☎28102 25105; ①) has four pretty and astonishingly cheap garden apartments, each with kitchen and veranda sea view.

Keratókambos

Keratókambos, 10km east of Tsoútsouros, is accessed by another spectacularly winding mountain road, this time from Hóndhros, near Áno Viánnos. Alternatively there's a good paved road along the coast from Tsoútsouros. Like Tsoútsouros, you would not at first sight describe Keratókambos as a pretty place: a single street of mismatched houses interspersed with cafés and tavernas facing a narrow, grey, shingly beach. But again it grows on you if you stay long enough to get over first impressions – peaceful and friendly, with good food and rooms. The beach, too is better than it appears, with sandy, shallow water for a long way offshore.

In theory Keratókambos is two, or even three separate villages, though in practice they run indistinguishably into one another. Keratókambos itself, with the best of the beach, is east of the junction where the Hóndhros road meets the coast; to the west is Kastrí, and then Pórto Kastrí where another ugly modern concrete harbour has been built. Most of the facilities are in Kastrí, on the shore close to the junction. Among these are *Filoxenia* (Ⓣ28950 51371; ❸), offering clean, modern en-suite rooms with air conditioning, TV and kitchenette. Nearby, two of the best local **tavernas**, *Morning Star* (Ⓣ28950 51209; ❷) and *Taverna Kriti* (*Jason Apartments*, Ⓣ28950 51231, Ⓕ28950 51456; ❸) offer simpler rooms. East of here in Keratókambos proper, *Komis Studios* (April–Nov Ⓣ28950 51390, Ⓦwww.komisstudios.gr; ❽) is a significant step up in price and quality, with attractive designer studio apartments in a garden setting equipped with minibar, TV and room safe. Finally, there are also numerous rooms places attractively sited above the village around the road down from Hóndhros, with fine views out to the Libyan Sea: a good choice here is *Pan Apartments* (Ⓣ28950 51220, Ⓦwww.pan-appartments.de; ❷), where studios and apartments come with kitchenette, sea view and a pretty garden.

From Keratókambos the coastal route east towards Árvi is a meandering, rough but driveable track that gets better the further along you go, passing beneath a great crag of rock with a ruined castle perched upon it. Alternatively, the paved road back up the mountain leads you to Áno Viánnos.

Áno Viánnos and around

Áno Viánnos clings to the southern slopes of the Dhíkti range, a large village where almost everyone seems to pull over to break their journey. Given the narrow streets and lack of parking this can be unfortunate, but the air of busy chaos seems appropriate, somehow, in what was traditionally the administrative and market centre of this part of southeastern Iráklion province. Its importance has waned as the coastal settlements have grown but it's still a busy place, and there are some interesting churches to see as well as plenty of places to eat or drink. The sharper, cooler air up here is refreshing too.

The **churches** are signed from the main street, up the narrow alleys in the upper part of the town. The most interesting is fourteenth-century Ayía Pelayía, with a magnificent, if damaged, fresco of the *Crucifixion* on the back wall. The *Taverna Lefkes* (Ⓣ28950 22719; ❶), downhill from the modern church, has basic **rooms** and decent food, and there are numerous other *kafenía* and restaurants along the main street.

Káto Sími

East of Áno Viánnos the road to Árvi turns off at **Amirás**, alongside a giant memorial to the Cretans killed in World War II. A couple of kilometres further, just outside Péfkos, you can turn left for a scenic detour to the village of Káto Sími and its atmospheric **ancient sanctuary** of Hermes and Aphrodite. If you miss the first turning there's another, equally poorly signed, after another kilometre, just beyond a concrete aqueduct over the road. The trip is worth it for the adventure as much as anything – an intimidating drive up into the mountains round first-gear hairpins, on asphalt as far as the village and a good dirt track thereafter, with a rocky scramble around the site, surrounded by pine forest, to reward you at the end.

Káto Sími itself has another war memorial, commemorating five hundred people put to death in 1943 when it and six other settlements were destroyed in retaliation for an attack on a German patrol. At the friendly *Taverna Afrodite*, mountain honey is on sale. Beyond the taverna, wooden signs to Omalos Kristos, a chapel much higher in the mountains, will lead you to the sanctuary. Three kilometres above the village, keep your eyes peeled for a "danger of fire" warning sign to the right depicting a lighted cigarette and flames – alongside this is another sign in Greek announcing the site. The sturdy fence should be visible just above you, and although the site is almost always locked, the remains can easily be viewed by making a circuit of the exterior.

Known locally as **Kryá Vrísi** (cold spring), the site is laid out on a series of broad ledges on the mountainside where a prodigious spring gushes clear, ice-cold water all year round. There is evidence of a **shrine** here dating back to prehistoric times. Adopted by the **Minoans**, it became a holy place of overwhelming importance, as evidenced by the thousands of votive clay and bronze figurines and vases brought here by pilgrims, many of which are now on display in the Iráklion Archeological Museum. In Greek and Roman times the shrine continued to be an important centre of pilgrimage, now to Hermes Kendrites and Aphrodite. The spring still flows high up on the eastern side of the site, just outside the fence: here too is an enormous hollow plane tree, which seems old enough to have witnessed many of the sacrifices and ceremonies that took place here in ancient times. The most obvious remains are in this corner of the site, including vestiges of temples, altars and cult rooms dating from all periods. Today most of the springwater disperses down the mountainside via plastic pipes to irrigate the olive groves below, but enough escapes to create several small waterfalls that you'll have passed on the way up.

Árvi and around

Standing on the site of the ancient Roman town of Arvis and hemmed in by rock cliffs that trap the heat – creating a microclimate that is among the hottest in Crete – **Árvi** sounds promising. Yet again, though, it's not a remotely attractive place, with another ugly, half-built concrete harbour (and seemingly endless construction work) and a long, narrow, pebbly beach. In addition, the near-tropical environment is ideal for growing bananas, oranges, pineapples and the like, and a few lean tourist years have made the village even more dependent on agriculture. The gauntlet of plastic greenhouses you traverse en route to the coast does little to add to its allure. There are, though, a couple of daily buses from Iráklion.

The main (and only) street runs inland behind the beach, with rooms and tavernas directly on the sea. Everything you're looking for is somewhere along this road – minimarkets, bars, accommodation and food, though there's no bank or ATM, and very few places here seem to accept cards. Finding a **room** is rarely a problem, though many of the places are very small, so the best tactic is to ask at the tavernas, where they'll usually know who has space. The *Hotel Ariadne* (☎28950 71300; ❸), at the west end of the village, is the fanciest place in town, with balcony sea-view rooms, though the *Hotel Kyma* (at *Taverna Galazia Akti*, ☎28950 71344; ❷) has a friendlier atmosphere and better location at the eastern end of the village, with pleasant studio rooms with balcony views and kitchenette. Or ask at *Taverna Diktina* about studios and rooms at *Villa Arvi* (☎28950 71249; ❷). If it's lonely isolation you're after, *Rent Rooms Kolibi* (☎28950 71250; ❷) sits by a small beach a couple of kilometres west of Árvi, on an unpaved road: here sea-view rooms come with balcony and bath, and breakfast tables sit beneath tamarisk trees in a delightful garden.

Once you've settled in, there's not much to do in Árvi apart from baking in the sun – something you can often do comfortably here even when the rest of the island is too cold to contemplate it. When you need shade, there are numerous stores, bars, cafés and **tavernas**: of the latter the *Galazia Akti* and *Diktina* are the best. One diversion is the pleasant fifteen-minute walk up to the picturesque nineteenth-century monastery of **Áyios Andónios**, which now has only a couple of monks in

Greek place names

ΑΓ ΠΕΛΑΓΙΑ	Αγ Πελαγία	Ay. Pelayía
ΑΜΝΗΣΟΣ	Αμνήσος	Amnísos
ΑΝΩ ΒΙΑΝΝΟΣ	Ανω Βιάννος	Áno Viánnos
ΑΡΒΗ	Αρβη	Árvi
ΑΡΧΑΝΕΣ	Αρχάνες	Arhánes
ΒΑΘΥΠΕΤΡΟ	Βαθύπετρο	Vathípetro
ΓΙΟΥΧΤΑΣ	Γιούχτας	Yioúhtas
ΓΟΥΡΝΕΣ	Γούρνες	Goúrnes
ΓΟΡΤΥΣ	Γόρτυς	Górtys
ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ	Ηράκλειο	Iráklion
ΚΑΛΟΙ ΛΙΜΕΝΕΣ	Καλοί Λιμένες	Kalí Liménes
ΚΕΡΑΤΟΚΑΜΠΟΣ	Κερατόκαμπος	Keratókambos
ΚΝΩΣΟΣ	Κνωσός	Knossós
ΛΕΝΤΑΣ	Λέντας	Léndas
ΜΑΛΙΑ	Μάλια	Mália
ΜΑΤΑΛΑ	Μάταλα	Mátala
ΜΟΙΡΕΣ	Μοίρες	Míres
ΤΣΟΥΤΣΟΥΡΟΣ	Τσούτσουρος	Tsoútsouros
ΤΥΛΙΣΟΣ	Τύλισος	Tílissos
ΤΥΜΠΑΚΙ	Τυμπάκι	Timbáki
ΦΑΙΣΤΟΣ	Φαιστός	Festós
ΦΟΔΕΛΕ	Φόδελε	Fódhele
ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ	Χερσόνησος	Hersónisos

residence. Head to the back of the village and you'll come to signposts guiding you to a track across a valley towards the monastery. It's especially tranquil here at dusk, when the monks sit out on their terrace, happy to converse with passing visitors.

Akrotíri Sidonía and Tértsa

Continuing east from Árvi, a reasonably good dirt road leads past more isolated beaches to a couple of villages which are just starting to attract tourists. The first, **Akrotíri Sidonía**, is a fair-sized village with a broad, shingly **beach** considerably better than those at Keratókambos or Árvi. A paved road to Kalámi, on the main east–west artery, has spurred a little development here, but most visitors are locals and there are just a few, new **places to stay**. *Rooms Armonia* (☎28950 61445; ②), close to the junction; *Sidonia* (☎28950 61328; ②), at the eastern edge of town, above a good taverna of the same name; and *Villa Irida* (☎28950 61411; ②), above a café/taverna in the centre of town, all have comfortable, modern, air-conditioned studios.

Tértsa, some 6km further east, is a much smaller place, but set to develop thanks to paved roads from Sikológos, on the main road, and Mírtos, along the coast in Lasíthi province (see p.229). For now it's lovely, with a good beach, a couple of excellent tavernas, especially *Lambros*, and a few rooms to be had if you ask around. The only really organized accommodation is at *Tertsa Apartments*, with modern studios and two-room apartments, contacted through *Taverna Iannis* (☎28950 61444; ②) on the sea front.

Travel details

Buses

Some of these services vary seasonally, and many are restricted at weekends, especially on Sundays. You can pick up timetables at most bus stations. Information for Iráklion and Lasíthi at ⓦwww.bus-service-crete-ktel.com or ⓦwww.ktel-heraklio-lassithi.gr is not always up to date, though there's good information for services to the west at the former.

Iráklion to: Áno Viánnos (4 daily 6.45am–3pm; 2hr 30min); Anóyia (5 daily 6.30am–4.30pm; 1hr); Arhánes (17 daily 6.30am–9.30pm; 30min); Árvi (2 daily 6.45am & 1.15pm; 2hr 30min); Ay. Galíni (8 daily 6.30am–4.30pm; 2hr 15min); Ay. Nikólaos (26 daily 6.30am–10pm; 1hr 30min); Ay. Pelayía (5 daily 8.15am–5.30pm; 45min); Festós (10 daily 7.30am–5.30pm; 1hr 30min); Fódhele (2 daily 6.30am & 2.30pm; 1hr); Haniá (18 daily 5.30am–9pm; 3hr); Hersónisos (every 30min 6.30am–10pm; 45min); Ierápetra (8 daily 7am–7.30pm; 2hr 30min); Kastélli (7 daily 6.45am–7pm; 1hr); Lasíthi plateau (1 daily at 2.30pm; 1hr 30min); Léndas (1 daily at 1.45pm; 3hr); Mália (every 30min; 6.30am–10pm; 1hr); Mátala (6 daily 7.30am–5.30pm; 2hr); Milátos/Sísi (2 daily 7am & 3.15pm; 1hr 30min); Míres (14 daily 6.30am–8pm; 1hr 30min); Réthimnon (18 daily 5.30am–9pm 1hr 30min); Sitía (6 daily 7am–6.30pm; 3hr 15min).

Míres to: Féstos (10 daily 8.40am–6.40pm 20min); Mátala (6 daily 8.40am–6.40pm; 45min); Ayía Galíni (8 daily 7.40am–5.40pm; 2hr 15min).

Ferries

These refer to summer timetables; schedules are restricted in winter. For ferry company websites, see p.38.

Iráklion–Cyclades: daily fast catamaran (Hellenic Seaways/Super Jet) to Thíra (Santorini, 2hr), Íos (2hr 30min), Páros (not Wed & Thurs, 3hr 45min), Náxos (not Tues, Sat or Sun, 4hr) and Mýkonos (4hr 30min).

Iráklion–Dodecanese: Saturday morning departure with LANE lines to Kássos (6hr), Kárpathos (8hr), Hálki (12hr) and Ródhos (13hr).

Iráklion–Pireás: 2 daily, at 8.30pm & 9pm (9hr) with Minoan Lines and Anek.

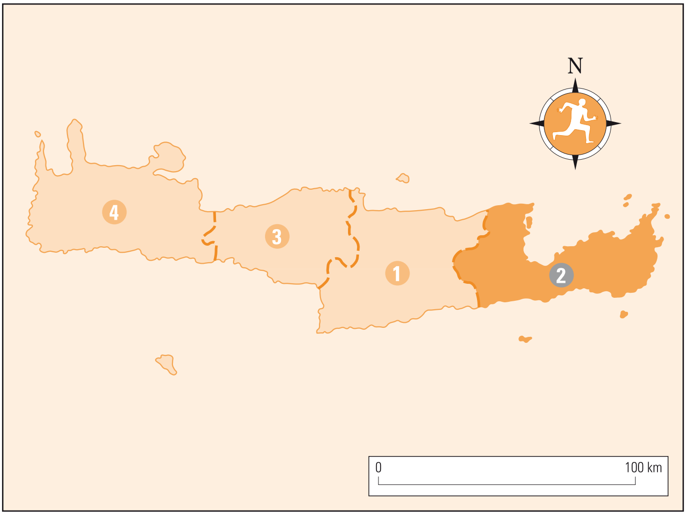
Domestic flights

These refer to summer timetables; in winter schedules are restricted, especially to the islands. For airline websites, see p.35.

Iráklion to: Athens (14 daily with Olympic and Aegean; 50min); Kárpathos (weekly with Sky Express; 1hr); Kós (2 weekly, Sky Express; 1hr); Mytilíni (Lésvos, weekly with Sky Express; 1hr 15min); Rhodes (at least 2 daily, Olympic and Sky Express; 1hr); Sámos (2 weekly, Sky Express; 1hr 15min); Thessaloníki (at least 2 daily on Olympic, Aegean or Sky Express; 1hr 30min); Thíra/Míkonos (2 weekly, Sky Express; 30min/1hr 30min).

2

Lasíthi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CHAPTER 2

Highlights

- **Lasíthi plateau** This spectacular mountain plateau is a verdant farming area, where cloth-sailed windmills, multicoloured wildflowers and soaring eagles compete for your attention. See p.170

- **Áyios Nikólaos** A centre of upmarket tourism and one of the most attractive towns on the island, with good restaurants and buzzing nightlife. See p.175

- **Kritsá** Home to one of Crete's most famous frescoed Byzantine churches, this traditional village is also a centre of weaving and lacemaking. See p.187

- **Sitía** Set around a beautiful bay, this is one of Crete's most easy-going resorts, with a couple of interesting museums and plenty of after-dark diversions. See p.196

- **Vái Beach** Fringed by exotic palms, Vái seems to have been transplanted straight from the Caribbean: if the crowds here prove too much there are many others nearby, including the island's best windsurfing spot at Kourémenos. See p.204

- **Palékastro** Standing alone on a windy hilltop and built like a fortress, this is one of Crete's most atmospheric monasteries. See p.205

- **Káto Zákros** With a romantically sited Minoan palace flanked by a cluster of fish tavernas and simple places to stay, Káto Zákros is a delightful seaside hamlet. See p.210

△ Embroidery and lace, Kritsá

2

Lasíthi

Eastern Crete is dominated by **Áyios Nikólaos** and the upmarket tourism it attracts, but get beyond the town and its environs and you have the chance to experience some of the most striking highlands and wilderness coastlines on the island. Áyios Nikólaos itself, along with the pretty neighbouring resort of **Eloúnda**, offers some of the island's best package holidays: lively and cosmopolitan, with a number of very elegant hotels as well as plenty more ordinary rooms and apartments. It's easy, too, to escape into the surrounding hills and mountains, where the town of **Kritsá** has a famous frescoed church and the **Lasíthi plateau** – a high mountain plain with picturesque villages and abundant greenery – makes an easy day-trip from the coast. North past Eloúnda and its beaches, you come to the brooding islet of **Spinalónga**, once a redoubtable Venetian and Turkish fortress, later a leper colony.

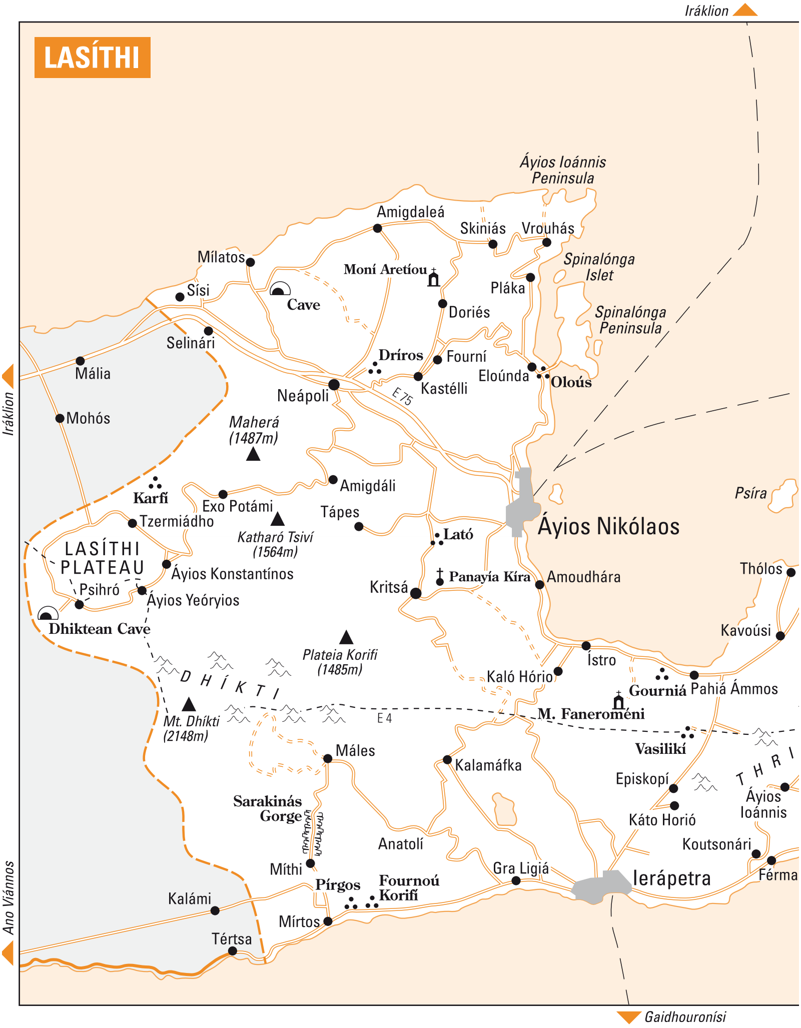
Move towards the far east of the island and the pace slackens as you enter a zone which is under the sway not of Áyios Nikólaos but of **Sitía**, an attractive, traditional town where tourism has had little outward effect. The Minoan workers' village at **Gournía** is definitely worth a stop en route whilst, at the island's eastern tip, the famed palm-studded beach at **Vái** and the Minoan palace at **Káto Zákros** are the major tourist attractions. **Palékastro**, between the two, has plenty of accommodation in easy reach of isolated beaches, while **Xerókambos** to the south is about as escapist as you could wish.

Along the south coast, there is generally far less development. **Ierápetra** is the major town in these parts, with a scenic harbour from where boats sail to the offshore desert island of **Gaidhouronísi**. In both directions from here, towards **Mírtos** and **Makriyialós**, is a string of low-key resorts with beaches as good as any in the province.

Transport in the region is excellent, at least along the main roads. There's a constant stream of buses between Iráklion, Áyios Nikólaos, Sitía and Ierápetra stopping at major points en route, and good local services from both Áyios Nikólaos and the inland centre of Neápoli.

Mália to Áyios Nikólaos

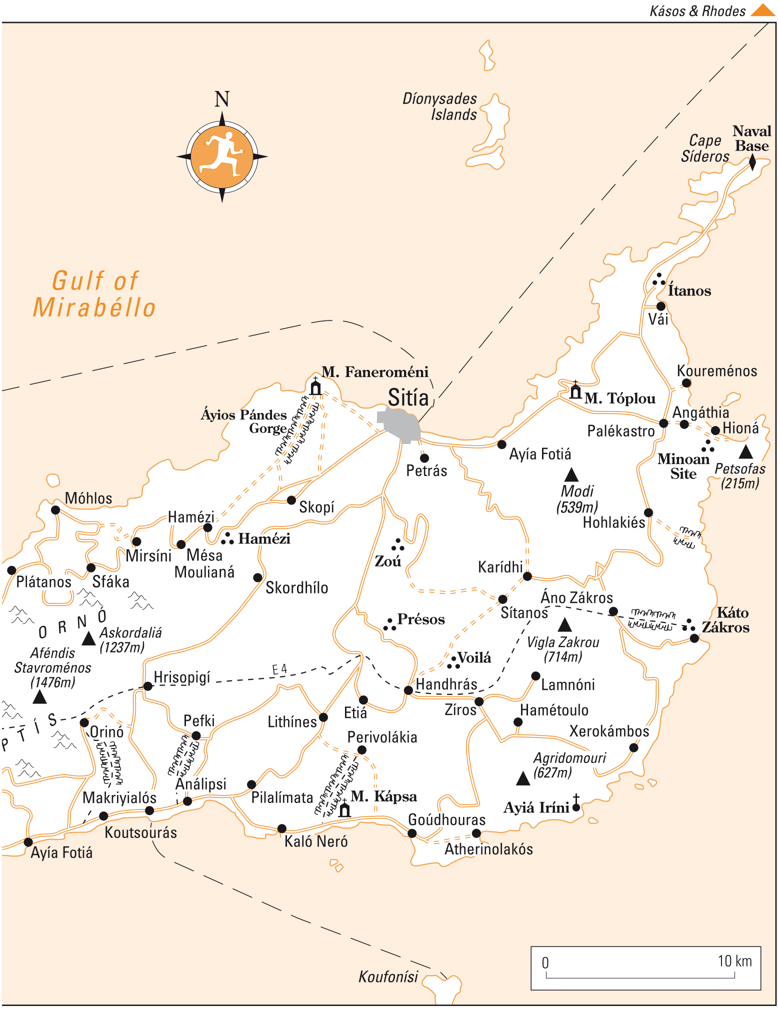
Driving into Lasíthi from Mália, there's a choice of routes. The fast E75 highway leaves the palace at Mália behind and embarks almost immediately on the long climb inland – rising at first through the **Gorge of Selinári**, where travellers would traditionally stop at the chapel and pray to St George for safe passage. There's a truckstop here, but most traffic roars straight past and on through the tunnel blasted


LASÍTHI
Iráklion
Áyios Ioánnis Peninsula
Amigdaleá
Skiniás
Vrouhás
Mílatos
Moní Aretíou
Spinalónga Islet
Sísi
Cave
Pláka
Doriés
Spinalónga Peninsula
Selinári
Dríros
Fourní
Mália
Eloúnda
Oloús
Kastélli
Neápoli
E 75
Mohós
Maherá (1487m)
Iráklion
Amigdáli
Psíra
Karfí
Exo Potámi
Tápes
Áyios Nikólaos
Tzermiádho
Katharó Tsiví (1564m)
Lató
LASÍTHI PLATEAU
Áyios Konstantínos
Panayía Kíra
Amoudhára
Thólos
Psihró
Kritsá
Áyios Yeóryios
Dhiktean Cave
Kavoúsi
Plateia Korifi (1485m)
Ístro
D H Í K T I
Kaló Hório
Gourniá
Pahiá Ámmos
M. Faneroméni
Mt. Dhíkti (2148m)
E 4
Vasilikí
Máles
Kalamáfka
T H R I
Episkopí
Áyios Ioánnis
Sarakinás Gorge
Káto Horió
Anatolí
Koutsonári
Míthi
Gra Ligiá
Ierápetra
Férma
Pírgos
Fournoú Korifí
Kalámi
Ano Viánnos
Mírtos
Tértsa
Gaidhouronísi

beneath the old pass. It's a tremendous engineering achievement, though beyond here – having bypassed **Neápoli** – there's little else to see until you emerge high above Áyios Nikólaos to spectacular views of the **Gulf of Mirabéllo**.

Sísi

The old road follows the coast for a while longer, rolling on through Sísi with a branch off to Mílatos. **Sísi** is a fair-size resort whose visitors, many of them German, mostly stay in modern apartment complexes scattered around the surrounding countryside. There are some attractive cove beaches to the east, such as sandy Sísi Beach (with cafés and showers) and Avláki, but none that are entirely undeveloped. **Epáno Sísi**, the inland part of the village, has one or two possibilities for


Kásos & Rhodes
N
Gulf of Mirabéllo
Díonysades Islands
Cape Síderos
Naval Base
Ítanos
Vái
Koureménos
M. Faneroméni
Sitía
Áyios Pándes Gorge
M. Tóplou
Palékastro
Angáthia
Hioná
Minoan Site
Petsofas (215m)
Ayía Fotiá
Petrás
Modi (539m)
Hohlakiés
Móhlos
Hamézi
Skopí
Hamézi
Mirsíni
Mésa Mouliná
Zoú
Karídhi
Plátanos
Sfáka
Skordhílo
Áno Zákros
Sítanos
Káto Zákros
ORNÓ
Askordaliá (1237m)
Préşos
Vigla Zakrou (714m)
Aféndis Stavroménos (1476m)
Voilá
Hrisopigí
E 4
Handhrás
Lamnóni
Pefki
Lithínes
Etiá
Zíros
Hamétoulo
Orinó
PTÍS
Perivolákia
Xerokámbos
Agridomouri (627m)
Análipsi
Pilalímata
M. Kápsa
Makriyialós
Ayiá Iríni
Goúdhouras
Koutsourás
Kaló Neró
Atherinolakós
Ayía Fotiá
Koufonísi
0
10 km

rooms, but a more tempting stop is **Sísi Paralía**, 2km away on the coast. Here a tiny, wonderfully picturesque harbour is overlooked by a string of cafés, bars and **tavernas**: round the corner facing out to sea *Fisherman's Place*, *To Paradosiako* and *Angistri* are three good, adjoining restaurants that specialize in fresh fish.

In the village there's everything you're likely to need including ATMs, car and bike rental offices, souvenir stores and even a launderette and a **disco-bar**, *Skipper*, close to the harbour. Because **accommodation** is so scattered – and much of it pre-booked in high season – the best tactic is to ask around at the tavernas near the harbour (try *Thalassimos Cosmos* for example) or at a local travel agency such as AIS Travel (Ⓦ www.sisi-crete.com), 50m up the main street from the sea front. They'll usually know someone who has vacancies (the AIS website has other possibilities). Alternatively there are plenty of "Rooms for Rent" signs along the roads as you aproach the village, or try somewhere like *Galaxy Apartments*, slightly inland and east of the village centre, an older complex with pleasant, air-conditioned ensuite studios with kitchen and TV (Ⓣ28410 71192; ②). For more luxury, the *Porto Sisi Hotel* (Ⓣ28410 71385, Ⓦwww.portosisi.com; ⑦) has the best location in town, right on the sea front, for comfortable, well-equipped apartments with kitchen and pool, though you pay for the privilege, especially if you want a sea view; complexes like *Bella Vista* (Ⓦwww.interkritiexpress.com/cc/ac/bellavista41; ③), in the hills a couple of kilometres outside town, have similar facilities, including a big pool, for far less. Sísi's **campsite**, *Camping Sísi* (Ⓣ28410 71247, Ⓦwww.sisicamping.gr), is located on a pebbly beach just over 1km to the west, and has its own swimming pool, restaurant and plenty of shade.

Mílatos

An unpretentious settlement with a line of tavernas fronting the sea, **Mílatos** remains less developed, possibly because of its uncomfortable pebble beach. Again much of the accommodation is in apartments in the surrounding countryside, but rooms are also available both in the village and at the beach settlement 2km away. Arriving at the beach, turn right (east) for the friendly sea-front *Rooms Taverna Sokrates* (Ⓣ28410 81375; ②), whose restaurant has fresh fish netted by the village boats. At the opposite, western, extremity of the sea front, *Porto Bello Villas* (Ⓣ28410 81001, Ⓔkiveli12@yahoo.com; ④) is a lovely little complex of modern apartments and studios with pool, air conditioning and satellite TV. Between the two are several other possibilities, while cafés, stores and even car and bike hire places cluster around a small church by the junction on the waterfront. Of several tavernas specializing in fresh fish here, *Sirines*, with its own fishing boat, is reasonably priced and worth a try.

Although you'd never guess from what remains today, **ancient Mílatos** has a distinguished past – even earning a mention in Homer's *Iliad* as one of the seven Cretan cities that sent forces to fight at Troy. In mythology – backed up by recent archeological finds – it was from Mílatos that Sarpedon (King Minos's brother, whom the king had defeated to take the throne) sailed to found Miletus, which was destined to become one of the greatest of all cities in Asia Minor. The site lies to the east of the beach, but there's little to see there: the city faded into obscurity in antiquity and by Roman times no longer existed.

More recent history can be seen at the **Mílatos Cave**, 3km east of the village. More a series of caverns than a single cave, this appears to go back for miles: with adequate lighting you might be able to discover just how far. Less adventurously, there's a small chapel to explore right at the entrance, a memorial to the events that earned the cave its notoriety. In 1823, during one of the early rebellions against the Turks, some 2700 Cretans (that, at least, is the number claimed) took refuge in the cave, were discovered and besieged. Eventually, having failed to break their way out, they were offered safe conduct by the Turkish commander – only to be killed or taken away into slavery as soon as they surrendered. A new building beside the road and a wooden walkway to the cave suggest that they may start charging for entry here, but for the moment you can simply walk in.

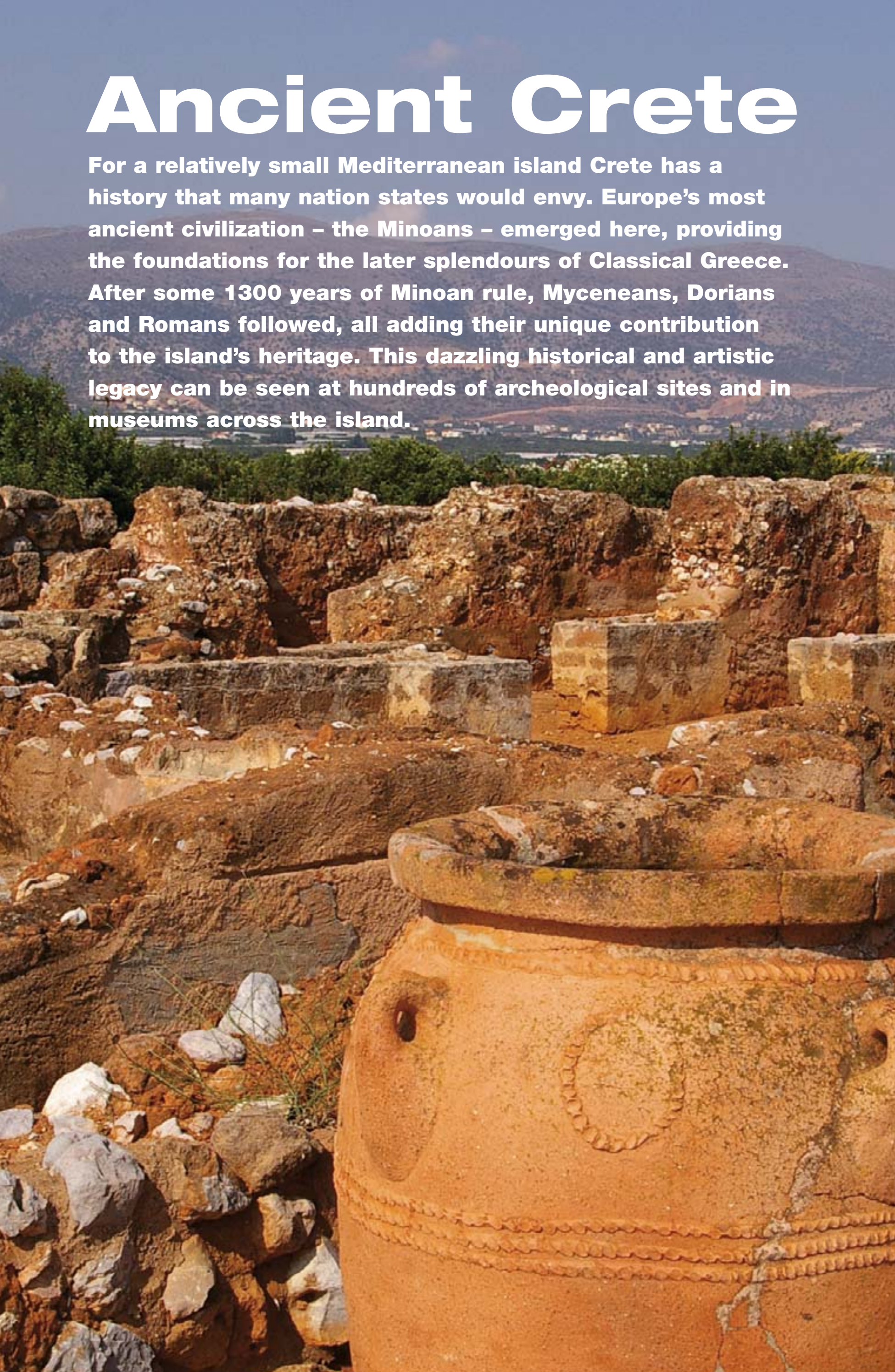
Beyond the cave, you could continue around the Áyios Ioánnis peninsula, or across to Neápoli, by a variety of dirt roads. Back through Mílatos village, however, the scarcely used paved road to Neápoli is an equally beautiful and certainly easier way to zigzag through the mountains.

Neápoli

Despite its size, history (it's the birthplace of Pope Alexander V) and location, **Neápoli** sees virtually no tourists other than those who stop for a coffee in the

Ancient Crete

For a relatively small Mediterranean island Crete has a history that many nation states would envy. Europe's most ancient civilization – the Minoans – emerged here, providing the foundations for the later splendours of Classical Greece. After some 1300 years of Minoan rule, Myceneans, Dorians and Romans followed, all adding their unique contribution to the island's heritage. This dazzling historical and artistic legacy can be seen at hundreds of archeological sites and in museums across the island.



▲ Ancient Lató

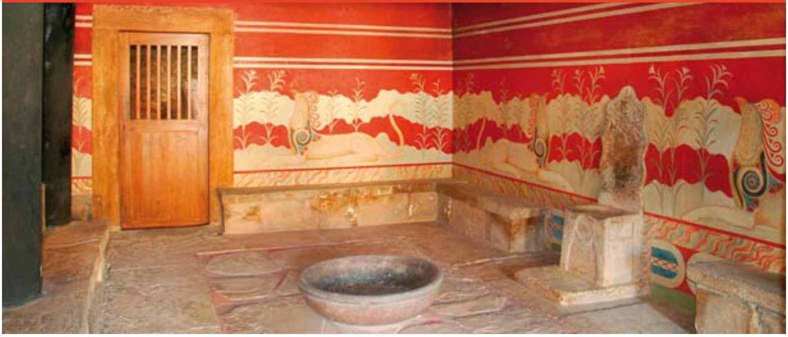
Stone Age to Minoans

The astonishing **Minoan civilization** – Europe's first – emerged in the period at the end of the Neolithic era around 3500 BC. Its relatively sudden appearance, accompanied by innovative styles of pottery and sculpture, suggests a new migration of peoples from the east. In the mid-third millennium BC the Minoans began to build large palace-like structures, set apart from the main settlements, such as that at **Vasilikí** in the east of Crete (p.191). These were the forerunners of the magnificent palaces built later at Knossós (p.102), Mália (p.128), Festós (p.142) and Zákros (p.211).

The museums across the island (pre-eminently that at Iráklion, p.90) are stuffed with a brilliant array of jewellery, sculpture, stonecarving, paintings, ceramics and metalwork from the palaces, but also everyday artefacts – hairpins, rings, utensils, musical instruments and bathtubs – that bring the day-to-day Minoan world to life.

The throne of Ariadne?

One of the most arresting finds at the Minoan palace of Knossós was a room containing a high-backed throne which its early-twentieth-century excavator Sir Arthur Evans promptly titled the "**throne room of Ariadne**" on the grounds that the gypsum stool's narrow proportions were far too slender to accommodate the prodigious girth of King Minos. Evans, to the alarm of many of his associates, blurred fact and mythology to the point where he seemed to believe that the mythical Ariadne – born of a liaison between King Minos and his wife Pasiphae, who later gave birth to the Minotaur – was in fact a historical personage. However, when it became clear that this was the only throne room going to be found at Knossós the diehard monarchist Evans changed his mind and it became – despite the tight squeeze – the Minoan king's seat of power. Present thinking is that it was probably not a throne room at all but a cult room presided over by a priestess and constructed not in the times of King Minos and the Minoans but in the later Mycenean era.



▼ Palace of Mália

Myceneans and Dorians

Minoan civilization collapsed sometime around 1450 BC in circumstances that are not entirely clear. Earthquakes and a cataclysmic volcanic eruption on the island of Thíra (Santorini) to the north may have both played a part. What is not in doubt is that it was the invading **Myceneans** coming from the Greek mainland who filled the power vacuum left by the Minoans' demise and colonized the island for three centuries between 1400 and 1100 BC. Occupying Minoan palaces such as **Knossós** (p.102), the invaders borrowed the Minoan script to write an early form of Greek. Minoans who had not been killed in the upheavals of conquest either fled to the mountains or the remote east of the island, where they attempted to preserve the remnants of their civilization.

Around 1100 BC a further invasion from the mainland brought the **Dorians** to Crete. From the same tribal stock as the Spartans, they dislodged the Myceneans using new iron weapons and introduced an aggressive warlike era to the island. The Dorians built impressive cities such as **Lató** (p.186) and **Górtys** (p.138) and introduced a severely hierarchical social system reminiscent of Sparta with a ruling class at the top served by citizens below and serfs below them. The end of Dorian Crete was presaged by endless wars between the city states, and the island gained notoriety as a haven for piracy. When the pirates supported Mithradates, Rome's enemy in Asia Minor, it was only to be a matter of time before the legions of the burgeoning power on the Tiber intervened.

▲ The fresco of the lilies

▲ Áyios Tios, Górtys

Romans and Byzantines

In 69 BC the emerging power of **Rome** invaded Crete and despite fierce resistance subdued the island in three years. Crete was then joined to Libya to create the new province of Cyrenaica with its capital at the city of **Górtys** (p.138) on the Messará plain in the centre of the island. Cities flourished throughout the island, which Rome endowed with roads, bridges and aqueducts as well as temples, statues and magnificent villas. With the division of the Empire into the eastern and western sections following the conversion of Constantine, Crete came under the sway of **Byzantium**. After a brief invasion by the Arabs in the ninth century, the Byzantine general Nikifóras Fokás liberated the island. Fokás went on to become one of the great Byzantine emperors, while Crete languished as a Mediterranean backwater. When Byzantium fell during the Fourth Crusade, Crete (as part of the booty) was doled out to a nobleman who, preferring a mainland territory as his reward, sold the island to the city of Venice for 1000 silver marks. The Venetians were to dominate the island for the next four and a half centuries. A very different age had begun.

Cretan caves

Despite being less than 260km in length and never more than 60km wide, Crete is studded with more than two thousand caves and countless more grottoes and potholes. These natural shelters served as dwellings and shrines for the island's earliest inhabitants, and even after people had begun to construct houses they continued to bury their dead in them. The vast, awe-inspiring interiors of many of Crete's caves, with their dark, winding tunnels and fantastical stalagmite and stalactite formations, clearly impressed these primitive Cretans as they continue to amaze modern visitors. Many of the caves' natural wonders were worshipped as cult images, as in the cave of **Eileíthyia**, goddess of childbirth, at Amnísos (p.97), where two stalagtites have been worn smooth by the touch of countless ancient pilgrims who believed them to possess miraculous powers.

square between buses or as they drive through. A charming provincial town, it was formerly the capital of Lasíthi (a role now usurped by Áyios Nikólaos) and remains the seat of the local government and of the provincial courts; it's a peaceful place for a stopover, and it is from here that one of the roads up to the Lasíthi plateau sets out.

At the south (top) end of the main square is a mildly interesting **folklore museum** (Mon 9am–2pm, Wed–Sun 9.30am–4.30pm; €1.50). Slightly east of this, in a courtyard on the left along the road to the Lasíthi plateau, a small archeological museum, displaying finds from the surrounding area, opens erratically. The only **accommodation** is a restored hotel, the *Neapolis* (☎28410 33967, Ⓦwww.neapolis-hotel.gr; ③), built in the Bauhaus style, with fine views from some rooms; to get there, follow Odhós Ántistasis, the street facing the main square's war memorial, for 200m. Things tend to happen (or not happen) around the sleepy main square, which is lined with a few tavernas and *kafenía*, as well as a post office and a bank. At *I Driros*, the *zaharoplastío* facing the war memorial, you can try a *soumádha*, a refreshing almond drink traditional in this region.

Dríros

To the northeast of Neápoli, on a road right by the junction with the E75 that is signed to Kouroúnes, Nofaliás and Skiniás, lies the ancient site of **DRÍROS**. The road curls steeply beyond the old and new roads (which here run almost exactly parallel) for 2km, where a signed turn-off on the right leads a further 1km to a dead end beneath a rocky hillside. The stepped path up to the site can be clearly seen from the parking area inside the fence. The earliest remains found here date back to the eighth century BC, and the city flourished for the next seven hundred years as an important ally of Knossós but a deadly enemy of Lyttos (see p.132). Dríros declined in importance prior to the end of the second century BC, when many of its citizens emigrated to Miletus in Asia Minor (see p.168).

Scrambling over piles of collapsed stones – ruins of the ancient city – you come eventually to a stone building under a corrugated canopy: the eighth-century BC **Temple of Apollo Delphinios**, one of the earliest known temples in all of Greece. It was dedicated to a cult that celebrated Apollo transformed into a dolphin, a guise the god used when guiding Greek sailors. That the chief sanctuary of Miletus in Asia Minor was devoted to the same cult is further evidence of a link between this area and the founding of the colony there. In the centre of the temple can be seen the remains of a sunken hearth. Amongst the discoveries here were three hammered bronze statuettes (some of the earliest known, now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum) and two Eteocretan inscriptions – Greek letters used to write a Cretan, possibly Minoan, tongue. As you look around today, it's hard to believe that this temple once lay on the edge of the bustling agora, or market square. This was approached by a flight of steps – visible on the west side of the canopy, to the left of the doorway. Another flight of steps joined the temple on the east side, and to the south is a huge **cistern** constructed in the third century BC, now crammed with fig trees.

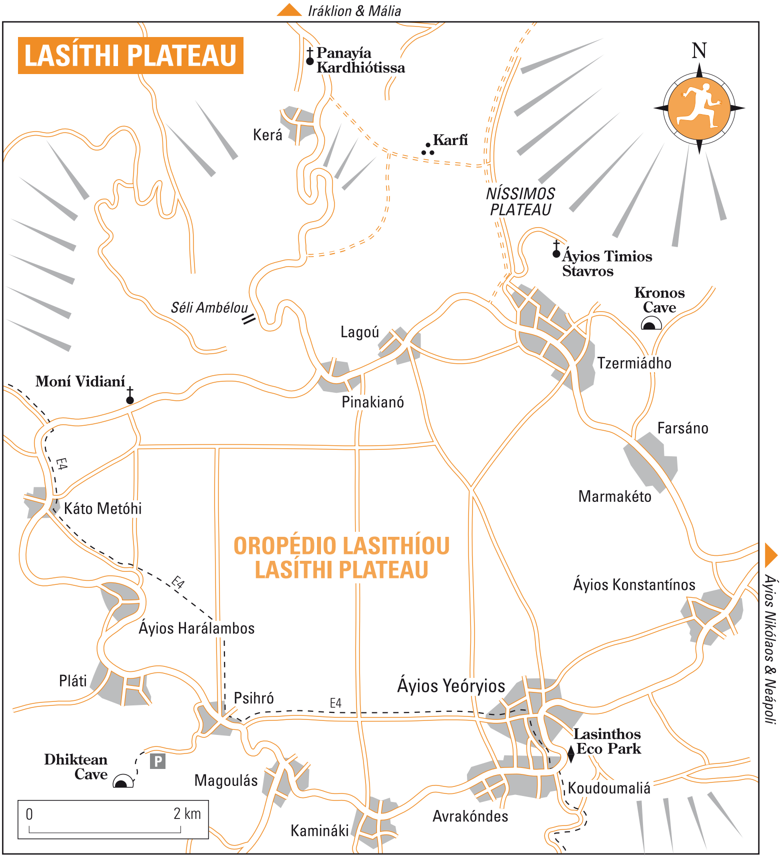
The path beyond the temple eventually guides you to a short scenic climb; vast cut stones on the hillsides all around here show how extensive this city must have been. Hopefully one day the site will be properly excavated, making the whole experience more rewarding; until then, finding anything else of note among the thorny bushes and ruined dry-stone walls is very difficult, and deciphering it once you do virtually impossible. Nevertheless, if you make it to the top of the hill and the charming barrel-vaulted **chapel of Áyios Andónios**, the glorious views make the climb worthwhile, whilst the drab desolation of the surroundings is a startling contrast to the green country around Neápoli. The stunted oak tree standing before the chapel – which also serves as a belfry, with the bell attached to one of its branches – provides welcome shade for a picnic.

For the inland roads beyond Dríros, see p.185.

The Lasíthi plateau

Every day, scores of bus tours toil up to the **Lasíthi plateau** to view its famous sea of white cloth-sailed **windmills**. Few of the mills remain in operation though, and those that do work do so only for limited periods; others are found next to tavernas and used as a feature to attract custom. Nevertheless, the trip is still worth making even if you see no unfurled sails at all.

From Neápoli, a long and winding road – thirty slow kilometres of it – climbs south and then west into the mountains that ring the sunken plateau. When you think you've arrived, another village appears around the corner and the road climbs again. Before you reach **Amigdáli**, there are a couple of roadside tavernas


Iráklion & Mália
LASÍTHI PLATEAU
Panayía Kardhiótissa
N
Kerá
Karfí
NÍSSIMOS PLATEAU
Áyios Timios Stavros
Kronos Cave
Séli Ambélou
Lagoú
Tzermiádho
Moní Vidianí
Pinakianó
Farsáno
E4
Káto Metóhi
Marmakéto
OROPÉDIO LASITHÍOU
LASÍTHI PLATEAU
E4
Áyios Konstantínos
Áyios Nikólaos & Neápoli
Áyios Harálambos
Pláti
Psihró
E4
Áyios Yeóryios
Lasinthos Eco Park
Dhiktean Cave
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Magoulás
Koudoumaliá
Avrakóndes
Kamináki
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△ Women selling honey and nuts, Lasíthi plateau

that have stunning views into the hills. If you want to break the journey up, stop off at the craftsman's house in **Zénia**, evident from the handmade spoons for sale hanging outside it, or call in at the small taverna in **Éxo Potámi.** At **Mésa Potámi**, 4km further, you are almost on the plateau, but there are more tavernas to entice you here, in addition to roadside stalls selling honey or whatever fruit is in season.

When you finally come upon the plateau laid out below you, it seems almost too perfect – a patchwork circle of tiny fields enclosed by the bare flanks of the mountains. Closer up, it's a fine example of **rural Crete** at work, with every inch given over to the cultivation of potatoes, apples, pears, cereals and almost anything else that could conceivably be grown in the cooler climate up here. The area has always been fertile, its rich alluvial soil washed down from the mountains and watered by the rains that collect in the natural bowl. In spring, there can be floods, which is why the villages all cluster on the higher ground around the edge of the plain, but in summer, the windmills traditionally come into use, pumping the water back up to the drying surface. Although the plateau was irrigated in Roman times – and inhabited long before that – this system was designed by the Venetians in the fifteenth century, bringing the plain back into use after nearly a century of enforced neglect (during which time cultivation and pasture had been banned after a local rebellion). Where they survive, the windmills have barely changed, and although many have been replaced by more dependable petrol-driven pumps they have been making something of a comeback in recent years, thanks to EU funding and tourism. The 26 stone windmills standing guard on the ridges above the plain, also mostly ruined, were traditional grain mills.

If you **stay overnight** you'll see a good deal more than on a day-trip, as the tour parties leave and a great peace settles over the plateau. The excesses of Mália or Hersónisos seem a world away as you climb into your cot to the sound of braying donkeys and a tolling church bell outside, and wake to the cock's crow the next morning. Early in the day you'll often see a diaphanous white mist floating over the plain and its windmills sparkling in the sun. The winters are severe here – up to half-a-metre of snow is not unusual – so the best time to visit is at either end of the summer season: in late spring, the pastures and orchards are almost alpine in their covering of wildflowers, an impression reinforced by the snow lingering on the higher peaks; in autumn, the fruit trees can barely support the weight of their crop. Whatever time of year you come, though, bring some warm clothing, as the nights can get extremely cold.

A paved circular road links the villages on the plateau's edge. From any of these, you can catch the **bus** as it circles the plain, or more enjoyably, walk through the fields from one village to another – the paths between Áyios Yeóryios and Káto Metóhi even form part of the E4 Pan-European walking route. Whichever route you choose the path is rarely direct, but it's easy enough to pick your way by the trails: crossing the whole plain, from Psihró to Tzermiádho, takes ninety minutes or less. A good time to take a walk here is the early evening, when you'll encounter the villagers on their carts, donkeys and pick-ups making their way back home.

Tzermiádho and around

Tzermiádho, on the plateau's northern edge, is the largest village and one of the least touristy; though there's a post office and bank (with ATM) as well as a number of *kafenía* and tavernas. Should you want to **stay**, just about the only option is the serviceable *Hotel Kourites* (☎28440 22194; ②) on the eastern edge of the village – they have some more modern balcony rooms above their taverna and also rent pleasant, fully equipped apartments in the old village (sleeping up to four, ⑤). In the village centre old shops that seem virtually unchanged in fifty years are interspersed with embroidery and weaving sellers, and a couple of excellent places to eat. 🏃 *Kronio* has an interesting Cretan-French menu thanks to the proprietor's Gallic wife, though sometimes it is deluged with coach parties from the coast at lunchtime; *Kri Kri*, round the corner, is also recommended. The old-fashioned bakery next door to the *Kronio* sells fresh, hot *tirópita*.

From the centre of Tzermiádho, there's a sign directing you up to the **Kronos Cave** (known to archeologists as Trápeza), in which remains and tombs dating back to Neolithic times have been discovered. The cave can also be reached by a signed road from the edge of Marmakéto, on the main road southeast of Tzermiádho. A path and stone steps take you the final 500m to the narrow cave entrance, where there's usually a guide to show you around and loan out torches. Though the cave is small, footing is slippery and treacherous and in any event it helps to have someone to point out the ancient tombs (in Minoan times, communal burials took place here, and many funerary offerings were discovered) and come up with fanciful interpretations of the various rock formations.

The ascent to Karfí

From Tzermiádho, there's also an ascent to the ancient Minoan site of **Karfí**, one of the most dramatic places in Crete, perched on the southeast slope of Mount Karfí with an opportunity to see some of the area's spectacular birds of prey. The climb, some 6km, takes around two hours on foot, less if you drive the first part; you'll need sturdy footwear and, in summer, plenty of water. There are a number of shady places for a picnic on the way up, or even at the site itself, but remember to take all rubbish away with you.

The start of the track up is located on Tzermiádho's western edge at the side of the district health centre, opposite a blue sign marked in English, "To the Timios Stavros church". Follow the path as it winds gently for the first couple of kilometres up to the **Níssimos plateau** (also accessible by car), where there are fine views back over the Lasíthi plain. Once on the plateau, you'll arrive at a fork where three dirt tracks diverge. Take the left track, aiming for a small, whitewashed chapel below a saddle between two peaks. Leave any transport near the chapel, from just to the right of which the well-marked ascent begins, through a rocky landscape patrolled by agile goats.

At the end of the climb the **archeological site**, with magnificent views over the coast, spreads across the saddle between the summit of Mount Karfí (the location of an ancient peak sanctuary), to the west, and the pinnacle of Mikrí Koprána (topped by a trig point), to the east. In this cluster of crude, stone-built, single-storey dwellings, founded in the twelfth century BC, Minoan refugees fleeing from the Dorian advance attempted to preserve vestiges of their ancestral culture. For the three thousand or so inhabitants who lived here prior to the site's peaceful evacuation around 1000 BC, life must have been a grim struggle, lashed by the winds and prey to the vicious winter elements. But this very inaccessibility was of great defensive value and preserved the settlement from attack, whilst the cultivation of the Níssimos plateau below provided food and pasture for livestock.

Among the ruins, excavated in the 1930s by John Pendlebury, the easiest structure to identify is what the archeologist described as the **Great House**, an important building still retaining its walls and where a number of bronze artefacts were discovered. Behind this, just to the north, a **shrine** was located containing remarkable, metre-high terracotta goddesses with arms raised in blessing (now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum). The remainder of this desolate village, intersected by a number of paved alleyways, isn't easy to make sense of, except for the dwelling thresholds and the odd evocative hand-grindstone lying among the collapsed piles of stones. Even so, this remote eyrie, with all its historical associations, remains one of the most haunting places on the island.

While you're up here there's a good chance you'll see the odd **griffon vulture** gliding majestically overhead, or maybe even the much rarer **lammergeier**, or bearded vulture, now down to a handful of isolated pairs. There are few more dramatic sights than this raptor hoisting the leg bones of its victims into the air and dashing them onto a rock below (nearly always the same one); once they are broken, the bird extracts the marrow with its specially adapted tongue.

Áyios Konstantínos and Áyios Yeóryios

Clockwise from Tzermiádho, the next village of any size is **Áyios Konstantínos**, very near the point where the Neápoli road emerges onto the plain. Here, too, you could find a **room** if you wanted one – tapestry seller María Vlassi has simple rooms sharing bath (☎28440 31048; ①) – and because it is the first (and last) village most people visit, it is packed with souvenir stores. Some of the embroidery and weaving is very fine: in the best, natural dyes from onions, walnuts and other sources are still used.

Áyios Yeóryios, 3km west and next in line, is larger and less commercial. There's a lovely, little-visited **Folk Museum** here (April–Oct daily 10am–4pm; €3) in a low-ceilinged, windowless farmhouse preserved much as it would have been in the early twentieth century. It's full of rural tools and artefacts including a great wine-press, which doubled as the family bed. Below is a bourgeois house of the same period with displays of old pictures, including many photos of Cretan author Níkos Kazantzákis, and between the two a display on shops and trade, including old barber-shop and blacksmith's equipment. Excellent-value homemade food and wine can be enjoyed at two places on the village's main thoroughfare: *Hotel Rea* (☎28440 31209; ②) also has simple, cool, en-suite studios with fridge above the

🏃 taverna; *Hotel Dias* (Ⓣ28440 31207; ①) can offer more basic rooms with shared bath. Also very good, the *Hotel Maria* (info at *Hotel Rea*, run by the same family, or Ⓣ28440 31774; ②) has a quiet location at the back of the village, with attractive en-suite doubles, twins and triples.

In an elevated position just beyond Áyios Yeóryios, the new **Lasinthos Eco Park** (9am–6pm daily, €2.50) is somewhat artificial, but very well done of its type. It consists of a courtyard surrounded by "traditional" workshops and displays – of weaving, wood-carving, pottery, honey production – along with a shop selling the products of the craft workers, a traditional *kafenío* and a huge taverna aimed at coach tours. Behind is a zoo of local, mainly domestic animals including horses, rabbits, goats and wild boar, planted with local vegetables, herbs and vines. And overlooking it all are some comfortable if sterile air-conditioned apartments looking out over the plateau, with fireplaces for cooler nights (Ⓣ28440 89101, Ⓦwww.lasinthos.gr; ⑤) – very peaceful at night.

Psihró and around

PSIHRÓ is the base for visiting the Dhiktean Cave, legendary birthplace of Zeus, and as such is the plateau's chief destination. Psihró village itself is another simple community strung out along a tree-lined main street. There are plenty of **tavernas**, both in the village and by the cave, and **rooms** can be found at the *Hotel Zeus* (Ⓣ69729 81782, or enquire at the *Taverna Halavro* by the cave car park; ③), a little way beyond the village beside the junction of the road up to the cave. The roadside 🏃 *Taverna Dionysos* (Ⓣ28440 31672; ②), just a kilometre or so east at **Magoulás**, also has quiet rooms with bath and balcony (some have a great view over the plain), and good food. If you find everything full – as is likely during the big local festival held over the last three days in August – you may be allowed to camp at one of the tavernas beyond the village's western edge (see p.175), provided you also eat there.

The Dhiktean Cave

According to legend, it was in the **Dhiktean Cave** (daily 8am–7pm; €4) that Zeus was born to Rhea. Zeus's father, Kronos, had been warned that he would be overthrown by a son, and accordingly ate all his offspring. On this occasion, however, Rhea gave Kronos a stone to eat instead and left the baby Zeus concealed within the cave, protected by the Kouretes (see p.441), who beat their shields outside to disguise his cries. From here, Zeus moved to the Idean Cave, on Psilorítis (p.265), where he spent his youth. This, at least, is the version generally told here, and though there are scores of variations on the myth, it is undeniable that the cave was a cult centre from the Minoan period onwards, and that explorations around the turn of the twentieth century retrieved offerings to the Mother Goddess and to Zeus dating through to Classical Greek times.

Concrete steps and electric lighting have made the cave an easy place to visit, although some of the magic and mystery has inevitably been lost. The steps lead you on a circular tour, passing the bottom of the cave where you are confronted with an artificial lake. The one experience that has survived the alterations is the view back from the depths of the cave towards the peephole of light at the entrance, framed in a blue haze caused by the damp atmosphere. It's not hard to believe the tales that this was the infant Zeus's first sight of the world destined to become his kingdom.

To avoid the crowds and savour the cave's mystical qualities to the full, try to arrive early (coaches start to arrive around 11.30am) or after 5pm. The cave lies a kilometre southwest of Psihró, where a signed side road takes you up to a car park where there are several tavernas and souvenir shops: note that **parking charges** here (€2) are strictly enforced – the money goes to fund local rural projects – so don't be tempted to park in the road before the site, where parking tickets are a nice little earner for the local traffic police. From the car park the cave is a ten-minute climb by a steep, rocky path, or a longer but easier walk up a paved track via the *Taverna Halavro*. You can also go up by mule (for a hefty €10).

Local tours

One of the cave guardians, the genial if now a little elderly Petros Zárvakis, takes people into the hills for **hikes** to spot wildflowers (mid-April to mid-June) and birds (April–Sept). From May to September, he also leads regular ascents to the summit of **Mount Dhíkti**, which include an overnight stay at a refuge and supper under the stars. It's not a terribly difficult climb, but you'll need stout walking boots or shoes and a sleeping bag. The cost depends on how many people there are (around €10 per person for a group of ten). For details, contact the polyglot Petros at the *Taverna Petros* (run by his family) facing the car park, or call him at his home in the village (ⓣ28440 31600, mobile ⓣ6945616074).

Completing the circle

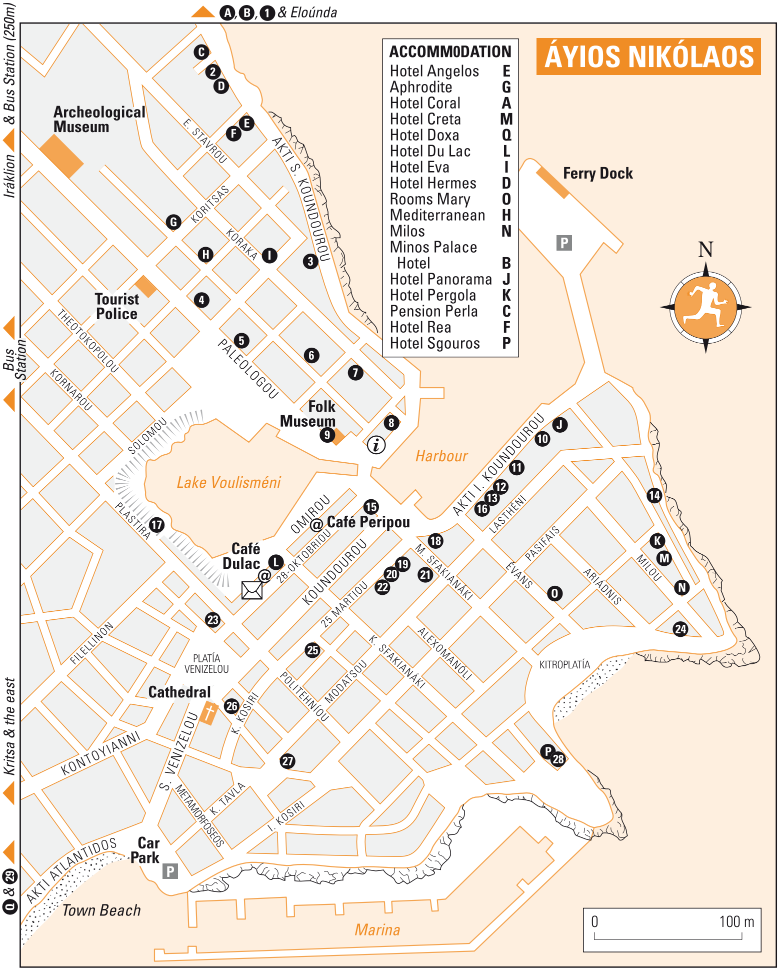
Beyond Psihró, the road completes a circuit of the plateau via the villages of **Pláti**, with more tapestry sellers, and the less exciting hamlets of Áyios Harálambos and Káto Metóhi, to meet with the road back to the coast at Pinakianó. This part of the circuit is far less travelled, but having come this far you may as well complete the circle. Numerous seasonal **roadside tavernas**, many of them very good, run by locals using produce from their smallholdings, can be found between Psihró and Pláti – one such is 🏃 *O Mylos*, with meat barbecuing over charcoal outside.

Between Káto Metóhi and Pinakianó is the **Moní Vidianí**, one of whose restored buildings houses the **Natural History Museum of Dhikti** (aka Bearded Vulture Information Centre; erratic hours, but usually open in summer; €1). The display covers local fauna, with many stuffed specimens, concentrating especially on the lammergeier or bearded vulture, and is informative and well-labelled in English, if not wildly inspiring.

Áyios Nikólaos

The centre of Crete's most upmarket tourism, **ÁYIOS NIKÓLAOS** – "Ag Nik" as it's known to the majority of its English-speaking visitors – has obvious attractions. Set on a hilly peninsula around a supposedly bottomless **lake**, in a lovely setting overlooking the Gulf of Mirabéllo ("Beautiful View"), it is wonderfully picturesque. Around the lake, the harbour and the nearby coast are dozens of cafés, restaurants and bars, many of them distinctly upmarket. Curiously, what the town doesn't have is a beach of any significance, so the five-star hotels are all some way out – mostly to the north, around Eloúnda – where they have private access to the coast.

In antiquity, Áyios Nikólaos was the port for the city of Lató (see p.186), though this settlement faded in the Roman period and seems to have been abandoned in Byzantine times. The Venetians built a fortress – of which nothing remains – and gave the surrounding gulf its name, Mirabéllo. The town came slowly back to life, and by the nineteenth century the port was again busy; following union with Greece in 1913, Áyios Nikólaos was confirmed as the **capital** of Lasíthi province. A quiet harbour town for most of the last century, Áyios Nikólaos was discovered in the 1960s by international tourism, and has barely looked back since. Today it makes a great base,


ÁYIOS NIKÓLAOS
A, B, 1 & Eloúnda
Iráklion & Bus Station (250m)
Bus Station
Kritsa & the east
0 & 29
Archeological Museum
Tourist Police
Folk Museum
Café Peripou
Café Dulac
Cathedral
Car Park
Ferry Dock
Harbour
Lake Voulisméni
Town Beach
Marina
PLATÍA VENIZELOU
KITROPLATÍA
E. STAVROU
KORITSAS
KORAKA
AKTI S. KOUNDOUROU
THEOTOKOPOLOU
KORNAROU
PALEOLOGOU
SOLOMOU
PLASTIRA
OMIROU
28 OKTOBRIOU
KOUNDOUROU
25 MARTIOU
M. SFAKIANAKI
K. SFAKIANAKI
AKTI I. KOUNDOUROU
LASTHENI
PASIFAIS
EVANS
ARIADNIS
MILOU
ALEXOMANOLI
POLITEHNIOU
MODATSOU
K. KOSIRI
I. KOSIRI
K. TAVLA
METAMORFOSEOS
S. VENIZELOU
KONTOYIANNI
FILELLINON
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ACCOMMODATION

Hotel Angelos	E
Aphrodite	G
Hotel Coral	A
Hotel Creta	M
Hotel Doxa	Q
Hotel Du Lac	L
Hotel Eva	I
Hotel Hermes	D
Rooms Mary	O
Mediterranean	H
Milos	N
Minos Palace Hotel	B
Hotel Panorama	J
Hotel Pergola	K
Pension Perla	C
Hotel Rea	F
Hotel Sgouros	P

RESTAURANTS

Auoas	4	Ofou To Lo	28	La Strada	23
Avlí	6	Parastries	14	Toedeledoekie Café	2
Du Lac	L	Pelagos	7	Twins	18
Hrisofilos	24	I Pita Tou Ríga	5		
Itanos	26	Portes	29		
Loukakis	1	Sarri's	27		

BARS & CLUBS

Hotel Alexandros	9	Lotus	22	Royale	19
Asteria	15	Mambo Disco	11	Rule Club	12
Café Migomas	17	Molo	10	Santa Maria	21
Café Puerto	16	Moritz	3	Sorreto	8
Candia	13	Oriental Nights	25		
Creta Café	12	Passion	20		

with plenty of good, mid-priced accommodation and lively nightlife: if it's a beach holiday you're after, though, you may be better off staying outside town.

Arrival and information

You get the best impression of Áyios Nikólaos if you arrive by ferry; the dock is on a tiny peninsula, a couple of minutes' walk from the lake and the pretty town centre. The **bus station** is at the north end of town, near the Archeological Museum, and to get almost anywhere from here you face a steep, uphill trek. To reach the centre, walk uphill and turn right along Knossoú and its continuation Kornárou, which brings you out above the lake; taking a left here to join Paleológou will lead you to the focal harbour zone. If you're **driving in**, follow the one-way system up the hill to Platía Venizélou, and then down into the picturesque areas past the souvenir stores which line Koundoúrou and parallel 28 Oktovríou. Parking places are thin on the ground in the harbour area, so you're better off leaving your car in the car parks near the marina or at the harbour, or trying the marginally less busy streets to the east of Platía Venizélou. The lake marks the centre of town in every way, and the narrow bridge over its channel is a notorious bottleneck for traffic and strolling visitors. From here, Aktí Koundoúrou curves around the sides of the harbour, and M. Sfakianáki strikes over a small hill to the cove of Kitroplatía.

The **tourist information** office (daily 8.30am–9.30pm; ⓣ28410 22357, ⓦwww.aghiosnikolaos.gr) is situated by the bridge and is particularly helpful, if often busy. They have lots of maps and brochures, as well as currency exchange at good rates and cheap Internet access (though only one terminal). The tourist police are at Kontoyianni 34 (ⓣ28410 26900), just off the bottom left corner of our town map.

Accommodation

Except at the peak of the season you're unlikely to have a problem finding a room in Áyios Nikólaos; however, with accommodation scattered on hilly streets all over town you may get footsore. If you haven't booked, perhaps the best move is to start at the tourist information office, which has a couple of boards with cards and brochures about hotels and rooms, may well know where there are vacancies, and can help make reservations. The nearest **campsite**, *Gournia Moon*, lies 17km southeast of the town along the coast (see p.191).

Hotel Angelos Aktí Koundoúrou 16 ⓣ28410 23501, ⓕ28410 25692. Welcoming small hotel offering excellent a/c balcony rooms with TV and fine views over the Gulf. ②

Aphrodite Koritsas 27 ⓣ28410 28058. Cheap and cheerful rooms place with lots of plants, a rooftop terrace and the use of a fridge. ②

Hotel Coral Aktí Koundoúrou 17, immediately off the top of our town map ⓣ28410 28363, ⓦwww.mhotels.gr. Comfortable three-star sister hotel of the nearby *Hermes*, whose a/c balcony rooms have sea view, fridge and satellite TV; there's also a rooftop pool and bar. Out of season, prices fall by up to fifty percent. Rates include breakfast. ⑦

Hotel Creta Sarolídi 22 ⓣ28410 28893, ⓦwww.agiosnikolaos-hotels.gr. Pleasant small hotel, incongruously modern in this part of town, where studio rooms come with a/c, TV, kitchenette and balcony sea view. ③

Hotel Doxa Idomenéos 7, close to town beach ⓣ28410 24214, ⓦwww.doxahotel.gr. Nice, modern hotel where well-equipped, a/c balcony rooms come with satellite TV and fridge. Open all year; rates include breakfast. ⑤

Hotel Du Lac 28 Oktovríou 17 ⓣ28410 22711, ⓦwww.dulachotel.gr. Perhaps the most unexpected bargain in town, with rooms and studios classily renovated in designer style with all facilities including a/c and TV (studios also have kitchen) in an absolutely prime location overlooking the lake, for far less than you'd imagine. Not all rooms have lake views, however, and night-time noise from revelers can be a problem, as you're right in the heart of things. ④

Hotel Eva Stratigoú Kóraka 30 ⓣ28410 22587. Simple rooms place with good en-suite balcony rooms with fans and sea view. ②

Hotel Hermes Aktí Koundoúrou 21 ⓣ28410 28253, ⓦwww.mhotels.gr. Recently renovated four-star sea-front hotel with a large rooftop pool and every facility in the rooms from minibar to satellite TV. Out of season, prices fall by up to fifty percent. Rates include breakfast. ⑧

Rooms Mary Evans 13 near Kitroplatía ⓣ28410 23760. Very friendly place with en-suite, sea-view balcony rooms with fridge and use of communal kitchen. Also has some good-value apartments nearby sleeping up to four for around €50. ②

Mediterranean S. Dhávaki 27 ⓣ28410 23611. Clean, economical en-suite rooms with fridges and fans, and use of kitchen. ②

Milos Sarolídi 2 ⓣ28410 23783. Sweet little pension east of Kitroplatía, with some of the best rooms in town for the price.

Spotless, en-suite balcony rooms (number 2 is a dream) with spectacular sea views over the Gulf. ③

Minos Palace Hotel On the promontory 1km north of town ⓣ28410 23801, ⓦwww.mamidakishotels.gr. The most appealing of a clutch of luxury hotels just outside town, this is a veritable village in its own right. All rooms are a/c and come with satellite TV, room safe, minibar and balcony or terrace – the pricier suites come with a private pool. Surrounding gardens have a larger pool, tennis courts and private beach with watersports. ⑨

Hotel Panorama Sarolídi 2 ⓣ28410 28890. Refurbished hotel in excellent position overlooking the harbour, with smart balcony, a/c rooms and an attractive roof terrace. ④

Hotel Pergola Aktí Themistokléous ⓣ28410 28152. Very good value hotel where all rooms have a/c, fridge and TV. Worth paying extra for a balcony and sea view. ③–④

Pension Perla Salamínos 4 ⓣ28410 23379. Budget sea-front option where en-suite rooms come with fridge and fans, and front rooms have sea-view balconies. ②

Hotel Rea Marathonós 1 ⓣ28410 90330, ⓦwww.reahotel.ae.gr. Friendly, family-run hotel, slightly run down, but with spectacular views from balcony rooms overlooking the Mirábello Gulf. ④

Hotel Sgouros Nikoláou Pagálou 3, Kitroplatía ⓣ28410 28931, ⓦwww.sgourosgrouphotels.com. Modern hotel next to one of the town's main beaches, with a/c balcony sea-view rooms with fridge and TV, and ample tavernas nearby. ④

The Town

Things to do in town by day are pretty limited – you're not supposed to have recovered from the night before so soon. A couple of **museums** hold some interest, but for most visitors the days are taken up strolling the area around **Lake Voulisméni**, nosing around in the shops, or heading to one of the local **beaches**, all of which have Blue Flag status. Closest of these is the sandy little cove of Kitroplatía, surprisingly pleasant despite being right in the heart of town, though invariably crowded. The main municipal beach (with entry fee), beyond the marina on the southwest side of town, is no less busy. Heading north, many locals simply dive off the rocks along Aktí Koundoúrou, or the first of the beaches in this direction is at Ammoúdi, about 1km out of town – again, usually packed. Further on in this direction there are more little beaches en route to Eloúnda, while heading south there's a constant stream of people walking to the excellent sandy beach at Almirós, 2km to the south, or using bus or bike to reach the good beaches at Kaló Hório and beyond (see p.188). There's also a wide choice of **boat trips** around the bay; see p.181 for details.

The **Folk Museum** (Tues–Sun 10am–2pm; €3) is near the bridge, housed on the ground floor of the harbour master's office. It has a small but interesting display of handicrafts (especially embroidery), costumes, pottery, cooking utensils and old Cretan goat-leather bagpipes.

The Archeological Museum

There's more interest in the well laid-out **Archeological Museum** (Tues–Sun 8am–5pm; €3) on Paleológou, north of the lake. Following some interesting Neolithic finds in Room 1, many from the large cemetery at Ayía Fotiá near Sitía, Room 2 contains the museum's star exhibit, the extraordinary **Goddess of Mírtos**. This goose-necked early Minoan (ca.2500 BC) clay figurine – actually a jug – was found during the excavation of the Bronze Age settlement at Fournoú Korifí, near Mírtos. Note the pubic triangle, breasts, and the square panels thought to portray a woven garment. The beak-spouted jug she's holding (which is also the vessel's mouth) is similar to vases in the museum from the same period. There's also gold jewellery from Early Minoan (2300–2000 BC) tombs at Mohlós. These first two rooms also contain some fine examples of Vasilikí ware, named after the early Bronze Age site on the isthmus of Ierápetra where it was first discovered. The lustrous mottled finish of this pottery was achieved by uneven firing, an effect which obviously pleased its creators. Even more remarkably, these flawless artefacts – including a "teapot" and a beak-spouted ewer dating from around 2500 BC – were made not on a wheel but on the clay "turntables" exhibited in Room 2.

Room 3 is mostly devoted to the palace at **Mália**: recent finds from there and from Zákros are displayed in this museum, though the major original discoveries are at Iráklion. Many come from Quartier Mu (see p.130), including tools and some delicate ceramic wares. A curious **model house** found in sector "N" of the palace has a pitched roof and chimneys – both foreign concepts in Minoan architecture. There's also a beautiful **gold pin** (of unknown provenance) bearing an intricately crafted bramble motif and a tantalizingly long inscription in the undeciphered Linear A script on the reverse. **Linear B inscriptions** found in the palace are evidence of a Mycenaean presence in the period 1450–1200 BC, a fact only confirmed by these recent discoveries. In the centre of the room, an exquisite **stone vase** in the form of a triton shell bears the carved relief of two demons, one pouring a libation over the outstretched hands of the other. Note that the sculptor has even included the encrustations clinging to the shell – an ingenious touch.

Room 4 displays some fine Marine-style pottery which, although found in a villa near Makriyialós, is thought to have come from the Knossós workshop. In the same room is a wonderful collection of Late Minoan **clay sarcophagi**, or *lárnakes*, decorated with birds, fish and the long-tentacled octopus which seems to have so delighted Minoan artists. Archeologists assumed, when they turned up these items, that they were all burial chests. But when they found more of these painted tubs, with clearly identifiable plug-holes in the bottom, the Minoans had the last laugh – they were obviously avid bathers.

Room 5 contains a rare Minoan **infant burial** displayed exactly as found at its site at Kryá, near Sitía. Finally, Rooms 6, 7 and 8 deal with finds from the Greco-Roman period, mostly a story of decline. To send you on your way there's an eerie two-tier burial from the Roman cemetery at Potamós, on the edge of Áyios Nikólaos. A **grinning skull** from the same site has a wreath of gold olive leaves still in place about its crown; the bronze *aryballos* (oil container) and *strigil* (skin scraper) displayed in the same case were found at the dead man's feet. The fact that both these items were used by athletes to clean and tone the skin suggests that he was a victor in one of the important games. These men – who brought great glory upon their cities – were honoured to the end of their days by their grateful fellow citizens and were often buried in some style. The silver coin originally found in the mouth of the deceased (the traditional fare paid to the boatman Charon, who ferried the dead across the River Styx to the underworld) is displayed separately in the case.

Eating

There are tourist-oriented **tavernas** (invariably employing over-enthusiastic greeters) all round the lake and harbour, with little to choose between them apart from the different perspectives you get on the passing fashion show. Have a drink here, perhaps, or a mid-morning coffee – but choose somewhere else to eat. The places around Kitroplatía are generally fairer value, but again you pay for the location – the best-value establishments to eat tend to be less obvious, tucked away in the backstreets behind the tourist office or close to Platía Venizélou.

Auoas Paleológou 44. Very good, inexpensive traditional Cretan food, served in a plant-covered trellised courtyard. A bit out of the way, so can be half-empty and lifeless.

Avlí Odhós P. Georgíou 12, two blocks behind the tourist office. Delightful garden *ouzerí* offering a wide *mezédhes* selection as well as more elaborate dishes. Open eves only.

Du Lac By the lake ☎28410 22414. Probably the best of the lakeside restaurants, with a local as well as tourist clientele and good, fresh fish. Expensive, though, and you may need to book.

Hrisofilos Aktí Themistokléous. Very good modern *mezedhopolío*, often with an interesting twist on traditional dishes. Terrace looking out to sea.

Itanos Kýprou. Old-fashioned taverna decorated with huge barrels on a side street off Platía Venizélou, serving typical – and reasonably priced – Cretan food and wine. Eat indoors or on a terrace across the road.

Loukakis Aktí S. Koundoúrou 24. The town's oldest taverna (founded in 1952) is a good-value, traditional family-run place, with a small terrace facing the sea, not far beyond the *Hotel Coral*.

Ofou To Lo Kitroplatía. Best of the moderately priced places on the sea front here, with consistently good food.

Parastries Aktí Themistokléous. *Ouzerí* whose predominantly local clientele tells you it must be good – excellent *mezédhes* and fine sea views.

Pelagos Cnr Stratígou Kóraka and Kateháki ☎28410 25737. A stylish and popular fish taverna housed in an elegant mansion. Their delightful leafy garden terrace is the best in town and complements the excellent food. Pricey, but worth it. Booking advisable.

I Pita Tou Ríga Paleológou 24, close to the lake. Excellent little fast-food take-away/restaurant serving imaginative fare – salads, pita sandwiches, full meals and some Asian dishes; also has a small raised terrace up steps across the road, with lake views.

Portes Anaspafseos 3, near the town beach. Friendly, atmospheric neighbourhood taverna serving well-prepared taverna standards.

Sarri's Kýprou 15. Great little economical neighbourhood café-taverna in a quiet corner, especially good for breakfast but also grills and *souvláki*, served on a leafy terrace.

La Strada N. Plastíra, slightly northwest of Platía Venizélou. Decent pizza and pasta at this popular, upmarket Italian venue.

Toedeledoekie Café Aktí S. Koundoúrou. Friendly, quiet Dutch-run café, with international papers to read; great sandwiches and milkshakes by day, chilled bar at night.

Twins Fronting the harbour. Large and always buzzing pizzeria, fast-food outlet and coffee bar, open all hours with tables right on the harbour. Their "small" pizzas measure 40cm in diameter.

Drinking, nightlife and entertainment

After you've eaten, you can start to get into the one thing that Áyios Nikólaos undeniably does well: bars and nightlife. Not that you really need a guide to this – the bars are hard to avoid, and you can just follow the crowds to the most popular places.

For a relaxed **drink**, the *Hotel Alexandros* on Paleológou has a rooftop bar overlooking the lake which, after dark, metamorphoses into a music bar playing old hits. Even better views are to be had from the terrace bars overlooking the lake's western flank – *Café Migomas* is one of a number of stylish places here; good for breakfast and late drinks, although the restaurant is very expensive. The pleasantly old-fashioned *Asteria* café fronting the harbour is one of the oldest in town, and here – unlike many places in town – you still get a bill and they trust you not to walk away without paying. Spreading from the harbour along Aktí I Koundoúrou, a string of bars – *Café Puerto*, *Candia* and *Creta Café* among them – play cool sounds to customers chatting on their waterside terraces. Further round, a bunch of fashionable new café-bars look out over the ferry dock; *Molo* is a good choice here. There are bars on the opposite side of the harbour too, though fewer of them: *Sorreto* is a long-established haunt of ex-pats and tour reps, loud and fun if that's what you're in the mood for; *Moritz* could hardly be more different, fashionable and ultra-cool.

Later on it's an easy move to go **dancing** at places like *Rule Club* (I Koundoúrou, above the *Creta Café*) or nearby *Mambo Disco*. More raucous music bars and clubs crowd the bottom of 25-Martíou (known as "Soho Street") as it heads up the hill – *Royale*, *Passion*, and *Lotus* all go on into the small hours, as does *Santa Maria* around the corner on K. Sfakianaki. Further up 25-Martíou, at no.19, *Oriental Nights* is a big, Middle Eastern-themed club.

Each year, Áyios Nikólaos mounts a summer-long **cultural festival**, "The Lato", which includes music, dance and theatre from Crete, Greece and other parts of Europe. Keep an eye out for posters advertising the various events, or ask at the tourist office.

Listings

Banks Banks and exchange places are mostly found along Koundoúrou and 28-Oktovríou, where there are several ATMs. The tourist office also changes money at good rates.

Boat trips Trips to points around the Gulf leave from all around the harbour: stroll around and you'll be accosted by their operators. There are daily trips to Spinalónga (€12–€17), and various barbecue, beach and sunset tours, often with meals included. Longer trips to Móhlos (p.193) or even the island of Santorini are also sometimes available. *Cretan Sailing* (ⓣ28410 24376, ⓦwww.sailcrete.com) offers small group trips to Spinalónga and Móhlos as well as private charter of a small yacht.

Books and newspapers Anna Karteri, Koundoúrou 5 near Platía Venizélou, has a good selection of books in English, and there are other bookshops nearby. Good selection of foreign newspapers at QuickFilm, Koundoúrou 44, or widely available at kiosks.

Car and bike rental There are dozens of outlets, mainly in the harbour area. For scooters and low-powered bikes, try the friendly and reliable Mike Manolis (ⓣ28410 24940), who has a pitch at the junction of 25-Martíou and K. Sfakianáki; he also rents high-quality mountain bikes. Readers with this guide will receive a twenty-percent discount. For cars try Clubcars at Plora Travel (ⓣ28410 25868), 28-Oktovríou 24, or Economy (ⓣ28410 22013), Aktí Koundoúrou 15 under the *Hotel Angelos*.

Ferries The main agents for services to Pireás, Rhodes and the Dodecanese islands are Plora Travel at 28-Oktovríou 24 ⓣ28410 82804 and Nostos Tours, Koundoúrou 30 ⓣ28410 22819.

Hospital The town hospital is at the northern end of Paleológou, one block beyond the Archeological Museum; ⓣ28410 66000.

Internet *Café du Lac*, 28-Oktovríou 17, and nearby *Internet Café Peripou*, 28-Oktovríou 25, both have good connections and are pleasant places to hang out in their own right: the latter sells interesting Greek CDs and books. Cheap access at the tourist office too, but only one terminal.

Post office 28-Oktovríou, above the lake (Mon–Fri 7.30am–2pm).

Scuba diving Happy Divers (ⓣ28410 82546, ⓦwww.happydivers.gr) is based on the beach in front of the *Hermes Hotel* or will pick you up from your hotel. Pelagos Dive Centre is at the *Minos Beach Hotel* (ⓣ28410 24376, ⓦwww.divecrete.com)

Shopping The prime shopping street in town is Koundoúrou as it heads uphill from the harbour: head up to Platía Venizélou and then back down on 28-Oktovríou and you'll have seen most of what's on offer – from jewellery and fashion to souvenirs and sponges, photography to pharmacies and dive gear to delis.

Taxis Ranks in Platía Venizélou and outside the Folk Museum; or call ⓣ28410 24000, 24100.

Travel Agencies and tours Travel Agencies offering tours to every part of Crete and boat trips locally can be found throughout town. Two of the most reliable are listed above under "Boat trips", or try Minotours Hellas at 28-Oktovríou 6. "Little Train" tours of the town and surrounding country set out from the car park by the ferry port.

The Gulf of Mirabéllo

North of Áyios Nikólaos, the swankier hotels are strung out along the **Gulf of Mirabéllo** coast road. Within the grounds of the *Minos Palace Hotel* (p.178), as you leave town, is the Byzantine church of **Áyios Nikólaos**, from which the modern resort takes its name. To gain entry to the church (9am–6pm), you'll need to ask for the key at the hotel's reception desk, leaving your passport as deposit. The trouble is worth it in order to see some of the earliest **fresco** fragments found in Greece, dating back to the eighth or ninth century. The geometric patterns and motifs that survive are the legacy of the Iconoclastic movement, which banned the representation of divine images in religious art.

Soon after this, the road begins to climb; looking across the bay, you can make out the islands of Psíra and Móhlos against the stark wall of the Sitía mountains, while nearer at hand mothballed supertankers are moored among the small islands sheltering in the lee of the peninsula. One of the largest of these islets, **Áyios Pándes**, is a refuge for the island's wild goat, the *kri-kri*. The animals have an elusive reputation and usually manage to avoid the cruise parties from Áyios Nikólaos which put in to see them.

Eloúnda

The road drops back down to sea level as it approaches the small resort of **ELOÚNDA**. Eloúnda is distinctly schizophrenic: surrounded by some of the most expensive hotels in Crete, and by fancy apartment developments, it has plenty of jewellery and fashion stores and some very pricey seafront restaurants; on the other hand on the fringes there's a much more earthy resort, with plenty of inexpensive rooms and cafés that compete to provide the biggest, cheapest English breakfast. At the heart of town is an enormous seafront square with cafés and restaurants, stores and hotels on three sides. This is the best place to **park** if you've driven, it's where the **bus** stops, and is also the departure point for **boats to Spinalónga**. Just about everything else in Eloúnda is in the immediate vicinity, including the **post office**, bookshop with foreign press and books, and car rental offices. There's a small, helpful municipal **tourist office** in a booth on the square and several **travel agencies**, including Olous Travel (ⓣ28410 41324), next to the post office, can provide local information, assist with finding accommodation, change money and arrange car rental (twenty-percent discount at Olous Travel to readers of this guide). There's also a **bank**, ATMs and, just off to the south, an excellent bakery. **Internet** access is available at *Bar Babel*. There are **beaches** all around Eloúnda, including a good, sandy municipal beach stretching out north from the centre, and there are numerous popular swimming spots further out in this direction, along the road to Pláka. One of the most popular of these is **Driros Beach**, about 3.5km away, where facilities include a taverna and a large watersports centre (ⓦwww.spinalonga-windsurf.com) taking advantage of the sheltered waters of the bay to offer everything from windsurfing to ringos to motor-boat hire.

Accommodation

Many of the finest hotels in Crete are around Eloúnda – places like the *Elounda Beach* (ⓦwww.eloundabeach.gr), *Elounda Bay Palace* (ⓦwww.eloundabay.gr), *Elounda Gulf Villas* (ⓦwww.eloundavillas.com) and the *Blue Palace* (ⓦwww.bluepalace.gr), none of which have rooms for less than €250 a night, and all of which have spectacular villas with private pools costing several thousand. If you do want to stay at any of these then you'd be well advised to book well in advance, and will almost certainly find that they're significantly less expensive as part of a package. There are dozens of more ordinary places too, both in town and in the country roundabout: if you're having problems finding somewhere, try Olous Travel or one of the other agencies in the centre of town.

Akti Olous Hotel On the Oloús road ⓣ28410 41270, ⓦwww.greekhotels.net/aktiolous. An attractive seventy-room sea-front hotel where comfortable balcony rooms come equipped with a/c, TV, fridge and room safe. Has own seashore terrace cafeteria flanked by a small beach. ⑥

Christina On the Oloús road ⓣ28410 41882. Welcoming place offering economical en-suite rooms with fridges and sea views. ③

Corali On the Pláka road, behind the town beach ⓣ28410 41882. One of numerous places out in this direction, *Corali* (together with neighbouring *Portobello*, under the same management) has a/c studios and apartments overlooking the beach, all with cooking facilities, and a small pool at the rear. ⑤

Delfinia Rooms On the waterfront just south of the centre ⓣ28410 41641, ⓦwww.pediaditis.gr, info at the Pediaditis Bookshop on the main square. Rooms, studios and apartments in a great position right at the heart of things and directly over the sea (most but not all have balconies with views). Simple decor and perhaps in need of a refurb, but reasonably priced and well equipped – studios and apartments have a/c and kitchens. ②

Marin Rooms Behind the town beach ⓣ28410 41588. Simple rooms place with bath and fan or a/c, in a good central location. ②

Milos Rooms In the upper part of town south of the centre ⓣ28410 41641, ⓦwww.pediaditis.gr, info at the Pediaditis Bookshop on the main square. Under the same management as the *Delfinia*, this is a more modern apartment complex with pool and bar. Rooms, studios and apartments are all a/c, larger units have kitchens. ③

Pension Oasis ⓣ28410 41076, ⓕ28410 41128. On the road heading inland, north from the main square. Less than 100m from the centre, but it feels like a different town up here, quiet and rural. A friendly budget option with comfortable en-suite rooms with fans and fridges in a garden setting. ②

Olive Grove On the road heading inland, not far from the main square. ⓣ28410 42458, ⓔoikonomakis@acn.gr. Modern apartment complex with pool and snack bar, close to the action. All with a/c and kitchens. ④

Paradisos Taverna On the Oloús Road ⓣ28410 41631. Close to the *Christina*, this is another attractive waterfront option with balcony en-suite rooms; a/c costs extra. ③

Eating and drinking

Eloúnda has a good choice of **tavernas** and **restaurants** – many of them rather pricey, particularly those along the sea-front. Still, some of these are really excellent and towards the other end of the scale there are plenty of choices too, if you head inland or along the coast road out of town in either direction; the cheaper places tend to be "international", with set menus and rice, veg and chips served with everything. There are plenty of fast food and *yíros* outlets too.

At the upper end of the price scale good choices include the glitzy *Ferryman*, with candle-lit tables on a terrace right above the water (named for the 1970s BBC TV series *Who Pays the Ferryman?*, in which it featured); *Britomartis*, noted for its fish, occupying a plum spot in the centre of the harbour; and *Poulis*, with a floating pontoon close to *Ferryman*, also good for seafood. *Nikos*, bang in the centre of the square, has less expensive fish, well cooked, but patchy service and a much less elegant setting. Out behind the town beach, towards Pláka, *Oceanis* is among the best of many rather touristy options, with decent food and a great position.

Nightlife in Eloúnda is quiet, centred around café terraces and cocktail bars: if you want to dance all night, head for Ag. Nik. Nonetheless there are plenty of places to drink, above all around the main square, where *Babel* and *Aligos* are among the biggest and loudest. Out behind the town beach, *Manos* pool bar has obvious attractions – swimming and ice-creams by day, music and drinking by night – while in the opposite direction *Katafigio*, right at the start of the Oloús road, has live Greek music.

Oloús

The road to the "sunken city" of Oloús is hard to spot, turning off the main road in Eloúnda south of the centre, just before the road heads downhill to the square. After dropping down to sea level, it eventually reaches a causeway, all that remains of the sunken isthmus that once linked the peninsula of Spinalónga (often known as "big Spinalónga" to distinguish it from the more famous island of the same name) and the mainland. This is barely 3km from the centre of Eloúnda, an easy half-hour's walk along the coast. All around the causeway on both sides you'll find people swimming from small patches of **beach** or basking on flat rocks. Protected by it are the remains of Venetian salt pans, now fallen into disrepair, but which are worth checking for migrating birds in the spring.

The site of ancient **Oloús** lay around the far end of the causeway on the landward side, and along the coast to the south and east where a number of structures can be made out beneath the waves. Though it is known chiefly for having been the port of Dríros, what little remains is **Roman**: there's a fenced enclosure behind the popular *Canal Bar* (good *mezédhes* and moussaká at lunchtime) in which you can see the floor of a fourth-century Roman **basilica** with an odd, almost patchwork-style black and white mosaic, and among the rocks a little further round (watch out for sea urchins) are the sunken traces of harbour installations now submerged due to the rise in sea level over the past couple of millennia. The site has never been excavated, and this is about the extent of what is visible, but the excursion is worth it for the setting – the **beaches**, causeway, "French" canal and stone windmills. On the far side of the peninsula there are better beaches still – easiest reached by boat (enquire at any of the travel agents on the main square about trips or a private excursion), though you can also walk across to the nearest in a further thirty minutes or so.

Spinalónga

The imposing fortress rock of **Spinalónga**, at the northern end of the sheltered bay protected by "big Spinalónga", is a prime target of boat trips from Áyios Nikólaos, Pláka, and above all Eloúnda. The latter is certainly the most convenient point of embarkation, with *kaïkia* making the trip every half-hour from 9am (last return at 6pm; €10 return); most give you an hour on the island, though you can return on a later boat if you prefer.

Founded by the **Venetians** in 1579 to defend the approach to the gulf and the sheltered anchorages in the bay, the **fortress** (8am–7pm daily; €2), with its battlements, guard towers and seemingly impregnable walls, bears all the hallmarks of the Italian republic's military architecture. Like their other island fortresses, it proved impregnable and was only handed over to the Turks by treaty in 1715, some fifty years after the rest of Crete had surrendered. The infamous part of the island's history is much more recent, however. For the first fifty years of the last century, Spinalónga was a leper colony, the last in Europe. Lepers were sent as outcasts – long after drugs to control their condition had rendered such measures entirely unnecessary – to a colony that was primitive in the extreme and administered almost as if it were a detention camp (as described in *The Island*, a bestselling novel widely available in bookshops locally). Its jail was frequently used for lepers who dared complain about their living conditions.

Even today, if you can escape the visitors, there's an unnerving sense of isolation when the boat leaves you here, at a jetty from which a long tunnel leads up into the fortified centre. There are still just two easily sealed entrances: this tunnel, and a jetty on the seaward side (which you see if you approach from Áyios Nikólaos) which leads up to the old **castle gate** with its lion of St Mark. Around the base of the castle a real town grew up – Turkish buildings mostly, adapted by the lepers using whatever materials they could find. Although everything is in decay, you can still pick out a row of stores and some houses which must once have been quite grand. A couple have been restored to make a small **museum**, with photos and artefacts outlining the island's history.

Pláka

The colony's mainland supply centre was at **Pláka**, about 5km north of Eloúnda, once an isolated fishing village, now overlooked by a vast luxury hotel and with many of its decaying old houses done up by foreign owners or villa companies. It's still a very attractive, tranquil place, though, with a couple of excellent tavernas and numerous rooms. Boats cross to the island from the quayside beside the *Gorgona Taverna* (April–Sept half-hourly 9am–6pm; €7 return). Of several **tavernas** by the harbour (each with its own fishing boat), *Yiorgos* and *Gorgona* both have excellent seafood, though as always it's not cheap. Numerous places along the road through town rent out **rooms**, including *Athina Villas* (Ⓣ28410 32663, Ⓦwww.

spinalonga.com; ③), with air-conditioned studios and apartments with kitchens, and *Taverna Delfini* (☎28410 41489; ③), with similar rooms and apartments. There's beautifully clear water to swim in, from a beach on which the pebbles are rather too large for comfort.

Inland from Eloúnda: around the peninsula

The countryside inland from Eloúnda, on a small, triangular peninsula, is surprisingly wild and little travelled, with narrow roads through remote farming hamlets with few facilities. From Eloúnda itself you can wind up a steep, narrow lane through Káto Eloúnda, Páno Eloúnda and Káto Pinés towards Fourní and Kastélli (see below). Alternatively, the road beyond Pláka soon starts to climb towards **Vrouhás**. Here, and in the surrounding country, you'll see many traditional stone windmills, mostly ruined: the winds that drove them are now being harnessed by a substantial **wind farm** (see p.217) on the ridges above Vrouhás.

From Vrouhás and nearby Skiniás, rough tracks are signed to local **beaches**, plunging steeply down to isolated but unattractive pebble coves in a jagged, rocky coastline; there are small, seasonal tavernas at both. Inland just beyond Skiniás, a signed, paved road climbs towards the lonely, fortress-like, sixteenth-century **Moní Aretíou**, surrounded by cypresses and cedars. Recently restored, it often appears deserted, though a couple of monks do remain and the gate and church of Ayía Tríadha are usually open. Beyond, you can continue, on a paved road that initially winds through utterly barren mountain tops, to **Doriés**, where the church of Áyios Konstantínos holds an icon of the Panayía (Virgin), the oldest known on the island, dating from the fourteenth century. The church is sited near the heart of the village, and lies down a little path off the main road (marked by a small monument in the form of a church). The cream and brown painted house next to it is that of the *papás*, who may be available to open the church for you.

From here you can continue down to **Kastélli** and on towards Dríros (little over a kilometre on a driveable dirt road through the olive groves), or towards Neápoli and the main north coast highway. Alternatively, turn back towards Eloúnda via **Foúrni**. On the eucalyptus-lined road between the villages is the small **cottage industry museum** (Mon–Sat 9am–2pm, but erratic opening; €2), an old barn full of farm machinery, mill equipment and the like, with a vast, stone rainwater cistern out back. From here, the route winds down to Eloúnda with yet more wonderful views of the Gulf of Mirabéllo.

Kritsá and Láto

After Spinalónga and the Gulf, the other popular excursion from Áyios Nikólaos is to **Kritsá**, a "traditional" village 9km inland. Despite rampant commercialization, this is a trip well worth making for a break from the frenetic pace of the coast; buses run frequently from the main station. Along the way are a remarkable church, the Panayía Kirá, and an ancient site, Lató – both worthy of a visit.

Panayía Kirá

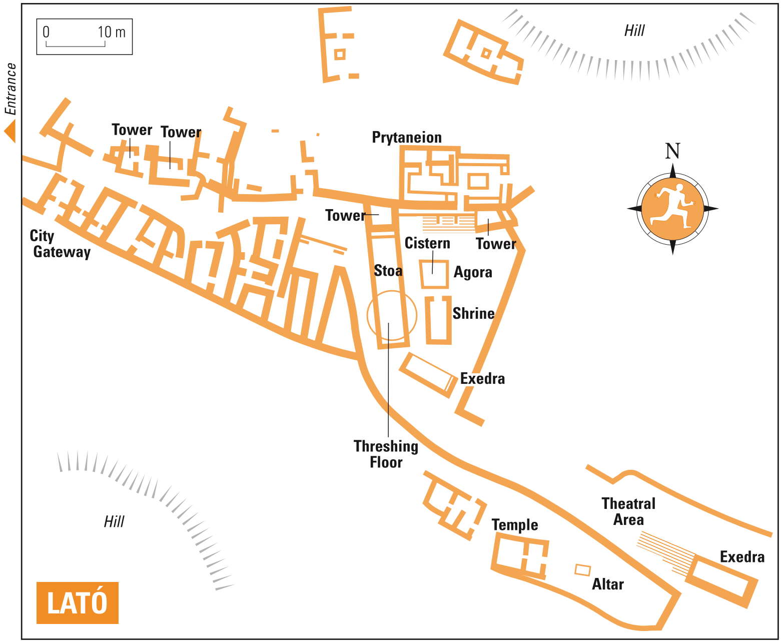
About 1km before Kritsá, the road runs straight past the lovely Byzantine church of **Panayía Kirá** (daily 8.30am–5.30pm; €3), inside which is preserved perhaps the most complete and certainly the most famous set of **Byzantine frescoes** in Crete.

The exterior of the church has been newly restored and stripped back to bare stone, but the real interest lies within, where the three naves are liberally adorned with frescoes on dark backgrounds. All have been retouched and restored to such an extent that it is impossible to say with certainty which is the most ancient, but the larger, central aisle is the oldest part of the church, dating originally from the twelfth century. The frescoes are mostly later: probably fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Those in the **south aisle**, through which you enter, depict the life of Anne, mother of Mary – her marriage to Joachim and the birth of Mary – and the early life of the Virgin herself up to the journey to Bethlehem. In the **centre** of the church, Mary's story is continued and there are scenes from the life of Christ, including the Nativity, Herod's banquet and a superb Last Supper. And in the **north aisle** there are vivid scenes of the Second Coming and Judgement, along with the delights of Paradise and assorted interludes from the lives of the saints (especially St Anthony). Throughout, the major scenes are interspersed with small portraits of saints and apostles.

Alongside the church are a couple of **tavernas** – *Paradise*, across the road, is good – and a store selling excellent but expensive reproduction icons.

Lató

Entering Kritsá, you can turn off north towards the archeological site of **Lató** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €2), about 4km up an asphalted road. Although there's as much to be seen here as at many of the more celebrated sites, it's very little visited: presumably because most visitors' interests are directed to the Minoans, and this was a much later settlement, Doric in origin but flourishing through to Classical times. Even the archeologists shared this lack of curiosity, for systematic excavation of the site started only in 1967. The city's name derives from a Cretan Doric corruption of **Leto**, the mythical mother of Artemis and Apollo. Homer relates in the *Odyssey*



how Eileíthyia (the Minoan goddess of childbirth) attended Leto when she gave birth to the god Apollo on the island of Delos: it is thus fitting that Eileíthyia became the patron goddess of Lató, as coins discovered here proved. That it was an important city is clear from the sheer extent of the ruins, which spread in every direction. It is a magnificent setting – a city of sombre grey stone sprawled across the saddle between the twin peaks of a dauntingly craggy hill – and standing on the southernmost peak you can look down onto the white cluster of **Áyios Nikólaos** (Lató's ancient port), with the bay and Oloús (a major rival of Lató in its heyday) beyond, as well as inland to the valleys and climbing peaks of the Dhiktean mountains. Ruins aside, these tremendous views are worth the effort of getting here.

You **enter** the site 200m or so below the ruins, following a rough path up to a rectangular area with a **gateway**, which would have been the original entrance to Lató. Continuing to climb up the street from here, you can see the stores and workshops abutting the city wall on the right, with defensive towers and gateways into the residential areas on the left. Higher up still, the open area of the **agora** is an interesting fusion of early Greek and older Minoan influences. This pentagonal space was a meeting place for citizens but also incorporates a tier of steps on its northern side, reminiscent of the theatral areas at Minoan sites such as Knossós and Festós. The steps ascend between the remains of two towers to the **prytaneion**, or town hall, with small rooms at the rear which held the city's archives. In the centre of the agora are a deep square cistern and a shrine, flanked on the western side by a colonnaded **stoa**, a shady place to shelter from the elements. The southern end of this has been cut through by a relatively modern circular threshing floor. The **exedra** nearby was a sort of public seating area, and in the southeast corner of the site is another exedra with what is termed a "theatral area" beside it – a broad flight of steps again similar to the Minoan style – which leads to a raised terrace containing a well-preserved fourth-century BC temple with a stepped altar just before it.

It's possible to retrace your steps from Lató to where the track divides, and then turn right along a paved road to head down (turning right again at the first junction) to Flamourianá on the Lakonía plain, from where there's a road – and occasional **buses** – back to Áyios Nikólaos.

Kritsá

KRITSÁ, about 10km southwest of Áyios Nikólaos, is known as "the largest village in Crete", though nowadays it feels more like a small town. The main street is lined with tourist stores selling (mostly) local weaving, ceramics, leather goods and embroidery. Despite the commercialism, prices are a great deal better than in Áyios Nikólaos – though you can still pay €500 and more for some of the wonderful, elaborately woven rugs – and if you manage to avoid the tour-bus crowds (early morning and mid-afternoon are the best times) the place reverts to a friendly semi-somnolence in which you're free to wander and browse under no pressure at all.

Kritsá's other chief claim to fame lies in its situation, with views back over the green valley up which you arrived and the mountains rising steeply behind. You get little impression of this at street level, other than an awareness that you are climbing quite steeply, so try to get out onto one of the balconies or roof terraces of the cafés and tavernas along the main street, from where you can look back over the town and towards Áyios Nikólaos. If you arrive by car, use the signed **car park** on the way into the village, as there's no chance of finding a parking place in the narrow streets. Near the car park is a **post office,** and there's an **ATM** on the village square where the bus drops you off.

The more attractive part of the village is the upper half, beyond the square, and this is also where you'll find the bulk of the better shops. There are several cafés and **places to eat** around the square, but again more alluring alternatives further up. Among these, 🏃 *Saridhakis* is a wonderfully old-fashioned café with an outdoor terrace shaded by a plane tree, and *Castellos* is a good taverna whose roof garden has great views. There are a couple of tempting bakeries too.

Staying in Kritsá is a surprisingly easy and attractive option. There are usually beds to be found and it's a good place to experience a genuinely Cretan atmosphere. One of the best rooms places is *Argyro*, on your way into the village (☎28410 51174, Ⓦwww.argyrorentrooms.gr; ②), which is clean and friendly, has balcony rooms with and without private shower around a courtyard (air conditioning extra), and its own café which serves Cretan dishes. *Pension Kera* (☎28410 51045; ②), up the main street from the square, has the least expensive rooms in town, but they're pretty basic. A lovely but substantially more pricey alternative is 🏃 *The Olive Press* (☎69730 91201, Ⓦwww.olivepress.centerall.com; ④), close to the main church, a Belgian-run conversion of a stone-built olive-oil mill. Here five comfortable, individual rooms and apartments come with air conditioning and a generous breakfast. If these are all full (which is unlikely), many local shops can put you in touch with family-run rooms nearby.

Around Kritsá

If you want to explore further, you'll find more frescoed churches here and in the immediate surroundings. **Áyios Yeóryios**, for example, is on the edge of the village, signed uphill to the left as you walk through: the frescoes here are contemporary with those at the Panayía Kirá, though in a very much worse state of preservation. Further in this same direction, **Áyios Ioánnis** lies a kilometre or so down the road to Kroústas. These churches will probably be locked, so you'll need to enquire as to accessibility from the guardian at the Panayía Kirá.

South to the isthmus

The main road south and then east from Áyios Nikólaos is not a wildly exciting one – a drive through barren hills dotted with villas above the occasional sandy cove – though in places the engineering of the new road (an ongoing process) is breathtaking. Beyond the reed-fringed beaches at Almirós and Amoudhára (with watersports and giant inflatables) there's little temptation to stop until you reach the cluster of increasing development around **Kaló Hório**, 10km south of Áyios Nikólaos. Here, there are tavernas and minimarkets, and paths winding steeply down to a couple of excellent small **beaches**. Immediately after is **Ístro**, a strip of development along the road with some scattered accommodation, where there are more superb beaches: follow the signs from town to Vulisma (or simply "to the beach"), down a variety of dusty tracks, for a lovely stretch of sand and crystalline water. There's a simple rooms place right down by the beach – *Rent Rooms Domna* (☎28410 61092; ②) – and a couple of seasonal tavernas, but little else in the way of development. Just beyond Ístro, the exclusive *Istron Bay Hotel* (☎28410 61303, Ⓦwww.istronbay.com; ⑨) hangs from the cliff above a spectacular cove with a fine sandy beach. If you walk confidently through the hotel grounds, you can get down to enjoy this and the hotel's beach bar: there's no such thing as a private beach on Crete, but seemingly nothing to prevent all the approaches to the beach being privately controlled.

Five kilometres east of Ístro, on an upgraded stretch of the E75, an exit on the left is signed for the **Moní Faneroméni**. The route soon doubles back to re-cross the E75 over a viaduct, and then heads inland. Asphalted in its early stages, the road (later a track) climbs dizzily skywards for 6km, giving spectacular views over the Gulf of Mirabéllo along the way. The **view** from the monastery itself, when you finally arrive there, must be among the finest on Crete. To get into the rather bleak-looking monastery buildings, knock loudly (and repeatedly, if necessary). When you gain entry you will be shown up to the **chapel**, built into a cave sanctuary where a sacred icon of the Virgin was miraculously discovered, the reason for the foundation of the monastery in the fifteenth century. The **frescoes**, although seventeenth century and quite late, are impressive – especially that of the Panayía Theotókou, the Mother of God.

Gourniá

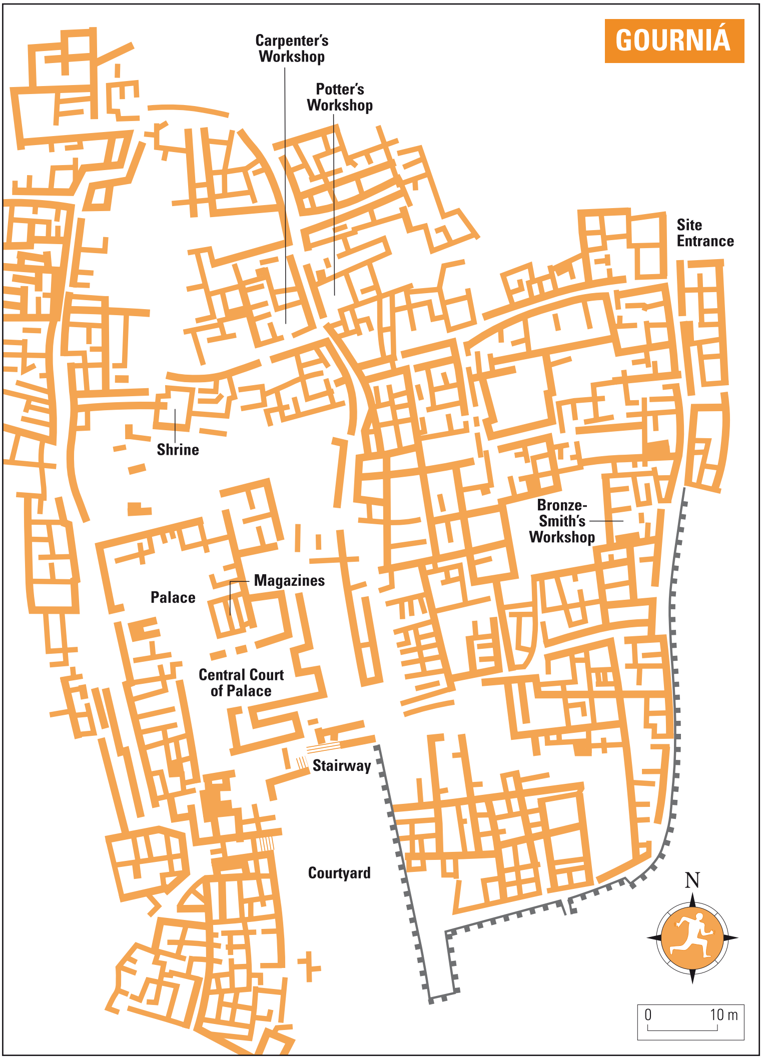
Back on the E75, the turn-off to the site of **Gourniá** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €2), slumped in the saddle between two low peaks, is just a couple of kilometres further on. A look at the map tells you much about ancient Gourniá's strategic importance, controlling, as it did, the narrow isthmus and the relatively easy communication this gave with the southern seaboard at modern Ierápetra. The overland route avoided a hazardous sea voyage around the eastern cape – a crucial factor in ancient times, especially in winter when sailing usually stopped because of rough seas.

Gourniá is the most completely preserved of the Minoan towns, and in its small scale contains important clues about the lives of ordinary people and the nature of the communities from which the palaces evolved. The desolation of the site today – you are likely to be alone save for the sleeping guard – only serves to heighten the contrast with what must have been a cramped and raucous community three-and-a-half thousand years ago.

There is evidence of occupation at Gourniá as early as the third millennium BC, but the remains you see today are those of a town of the **New Palace** period (ca.1500 BC). Around 1450 BC, as happened elsewhere, the town was destroyed by fire. Limited rebuilding occurred during the era of **Mycenaean** rule at Knossós – and the shrine may date from this late period – but the site was soon abandoned again and disappeared beneath the soil where it lay unsuspected until the awakening of archeological interest in the nineteenth century. Arthur Evans, as usual, was the first to scent Minoan occupation of this area, and then a young American, Harriet Boyd-Hawes, started digging in 1901. The site, a budding archeologist's dream, made her reputation.

The narrow, cobbled alleys and stairways – built for pack animals rather than carts – intersect a throng of one-roomed houses centred on a main square and the house of a local ruler or, more likely, governor. The settlement is not a large place, nor impressive by comparison with the palaces at Knossós and elsewhere, but it must have been at least as luxurious as the average Cretan mountain village of as little as fifty years ago. Among the dwellings to the north and east of the site are some which have been clearly identified, by tools or materials discovered, as the homes of **craftspeople**: a carpenter, a smith and a potter. It's worth remembering that the rooms may not have been as small as they appear – many of these are in fact basements or semi-basements reached by stairs from the main rooms above, and the floor plans of those did not necessarily correspond with what you see today. The houses themselves were mainly built of stone on the lower courses and mud-brick above, with plaster-daubed reeds for roofing.

The **palace** (or governor's quarters) occupied the highest ground, to the north of a courtyard containing a familiar L-shaped stairway. With a smaller court at its heart, the whole is a copy in miniature of the palaces at Knossós and Festós. About 20m to the north of the palace, a **shrine** was discovered. It is easily identified


GOURNIÁ
Carpenter's Workshop
Potter's Workshop
Site Entrance
Shrine
Bronze-Smith's Workshop
Magazines
Palace
Central Court of Palace
Stairway
Courtyard
N
0
10 m

by the sloping approach path paved with an intricate pattern of evenly matched cobbles, and the shrine itself, up three steps, is a small room with a ledge for cult objects. Here, a number of terracotta goddesses with arms raised were unearthed, as well as snake totems and other cult objects, now on display in the Iráklion Archeological Museum.

It's tempting to cross the road from the Gourniá site and take one of the paths north through the wild thyme to the sea for a swim. Don't bother – this seemingly innocent little bay acts as a magnet for every piece of floating detritus dumped off Crete's north coast. If you backtrack a little along the coast, you could head instead to the **campsite** of *Gournia Moon* (May–Sept; ☎28420 93243), with its own small cove and beach; there's a bus stop directly above the campsite on the main road. There's almost as much junk washed up in the cove here, but at least the people who run the site make an effort to clear it up. The campsite has a taverna and store, and if you don't like the look of the sea you can take a dip in its swimming pool instead. As you leave Gourniá and the E75 climbs the hill opposite, be sure to look back over the site, its street plan laid out like a map.

Pahiá Ámmos

Even its best friends wouldn't describe **Pahiá Ámmos**, in the next valley east of Gourniá, as an attractive town, but this windswept mess of concrete does possess an eccentric Greek charm. If you stop, there's every facility you're likely to need, including a line of seafront **tavernas**. ★ *Taverna Aiolos* (☎28420 93434) is outstanding – one of the best fish restaurants at this end of the island – and you'll struggle to beat the locals to a table in high season. Their *kolokithokéftedes* (courgette balls), *achinosalata* (sea urchin's eggs) and all fish dishes – caught with their own boat – are highly recommended. There's also a large and rather desolate grey-sand beach, which is at least clean thanks to floating barriers offshore that collect the rubbish afflicting other parts of this coast. From Pahiá Ámmos, a fast, new road heads inland across the narrowest part of the island, towards Ierápetra in the south, passing the archeological site of Vasilikí on the way.

Vasilikí

Heading south towards Ierápetra, the awesome slopes of the Thriptí range bear down from the east. Some 3km south of Pahiá Ámmos, a turn-off to the west is signed to the archeological site of **Vasilikí** (daily 8.30am–3pm; free). The site is visible from the main road, with an entrance from the side road a short distance down on the left.

This Pre-Palatial settlement, dating from about 2650 to 2200 BC, may not be much to look at, but it's important for the light that it throws upon the hazy millennium preceding the period of Minoan greatness. Remains from this period occur at Knossós and other palaces but cannot be properly excavated because of the important buildings constructed on top of them: Vasilikí was found in pristine condition, having being abandoned after a fire in about 2200 BC.

The site contains two main buildings, originally surrounded by numerous smaller (and simpler) dwellings. The remains of the edifice nearest to the entrance, on the lower slope of the hill, are slightly earlier than those on the crown. The **Red House**, as the former is named, has a number of interesting features. It is oriented with its corners towards the cardinal points of the compass, a practice normal in Mesopotamia and the Near East but alien to Egypt and the Aegean (and thus possibly a clue to Minoan origins). In the southern corner, deep basement rooms allow you to gain an idea of early Minoan building techniques: holes to support the absent wooden beams are visible as well as large patches of hard, red lime plaster, the forerunner of what later artists were to use as the ideal background for the wonderful palace frescoes. This material gives the dwelling its modern name. The **pottery** known as Vasilikí ware – orange or red with dark, blotchy decoration – takes its name from this site, at which the fine examples on display in the archeological museums at Iráklion and Áyios Nikólaos were discovered. New excavations on the southern flank of the Red House have revealed a bath, a stretch of roadway and more dwellings.

You can continue on up the lane into the **village** of Vasilikí, where you'll find a friendly **bar** and a glimpse of traditional rural Crete well off the tourist trail.

Episkopí

Almost exactly halfway across the isthmus, another worthwhile diversion is to **Episkopí**. Below the road, beside a central raised *platía* where old men play *távli* in the shade of lofty eucalyptus trees, lies a charming blue-domed **Byzantine church** dedicated to Áyios Yeóryios and Áyios Charálambos. The arched drum dome with elaborate blue-tile decoration, together with an unusual ground plan, make this church unique on the island. You may not be able to get in, but anyway it's the church's exterior (restored in 2003) which gives it its standing in Byzantine architecture.

The far east

The far east of Crete marks yet another dramatic change in scenery and tempo. Although much of it is rocky, barren and desolate, it is an area of great natural beauty. With the exception of **Ierápetra**, the towns and villages are slower and quieter, with life conducted at an easier pace. **Sitía**, in particular, exudes a contented air, and is largely unperturbed by its visitors. The north coast has few beaches, and in the main the mountains drop straight to the sea (the drive towards Sitía is as dramatic as any in Crete). If you want a cooling dip, though, there are a couple of coves which are just about accessible, and beyond Sitía, as the heights tail away, there's more opportunity for swimming. The far east is much visited only in two spots – the spectacular if rather too popular palm beach at **Vái** and the outstanding Minoan palace at **Zákros**; the small town of **Palékastro** makes an excellent base for both. Away from these, it's a great area for escapists. The south coast is more developed, but there are excellent strands at **Makriyialós**, **Ayía Fotiá** and **Mírtos**.

The road to Sitía

Beyond the isthmus, the tawny bulk of the Ornó range of the Sitía mountains makes a formidable barrier to further progress, and the road at first is carved into the cliff face, teetering perilously above the gulf. **Kavoúsi**, 6km beyond Pahiá Ámmos, is a pleasant village with Byzantine churches and a main street lined with oleanders and mulberry trees; at the far end of the village is a map showing walks to various nearby antiquities, including a Minoan farmhouse. A couple of places offer **rooms** here, including *Taverna Halkidakis* (ⓣ28420 94768; ②), with economical en-suite rooms. Many of the tempting **beaches** visible from on high are inaccessible, but **Thólos** – where there's a quiet pebble beach and chapel backed by tamarisk trees but not much else – can be reached by a paved road from Kavoúsi, some 4km away. The very pleasant, good-value *Tholos Beach* taverna (ⓣ28420 94785, Ⓕ28420 94810; ②), with comfortable apartments and **rooms** and fine views, lies in complete isolation about halfway down this road.

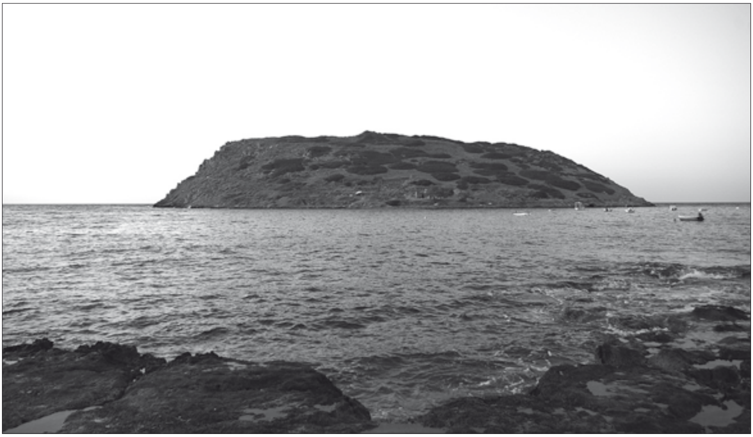
Beyond Kavoúsi, the views back across the Gulf of Mirabéllo become more expansive all the time, until at **Plátanos**, some 4km further, you reach a famous viewpoint, with a couple of tavernas – *Panorama* and *Platanos* – where you can look down on the island of Psíra, the site of a Minoan settlement, and west across the gulf to Áyios Nikólaos to watch the sunset. After this point the road runs further inland, emerging only occasionally to glimpses of the sea far below.

Móhlos

MÓHLOS is also way below the road, via 5km or more of dusty hairpin bends, but in a sleepy way it's a surprisingly developed place. Small as it is, almost every house seems to advertise rooms for rent, and there are at least half-a-dozen good tavernas, and as many cafés. The whole place, in fact, is much fancier and more upmarket than you might expect, which is largely due to the presence of Minoan sites on two offshore islets (see p.194). Not only do these attract tourists, but there are also American and Greek archeological teams still excavating, and they and their retinues often spend whole summers here.

If you're hoping to get here using public transportation, be warned that the bus will leave you on the main road, a good hour's walk above the village (more on the way back up). There are also occasional **boat trips** from Áyios Nikólaos. For those who stay there's not a great deal to do – swim out to the islet from the rocky foreshore or hang out in the cafés – but it's a place where it's very easy not to do a great deal. If you do want to be more active there are bike and car hire places which will allow you to explore the island, or check out *La Chlorophylle* (Ⓣ28430 94725, Ⓦwww.chez.com/annelebrun). They run (primarily Francophone since the area attracts many French tourists) botanical **guided walks** in the vicinity and also mountain bike, trail bike and 4x4 tours. *Barbarossa Tours* (Ⓣ28430 94179), by the waterfront as you enter the village, has details of these as well as car and bike rental, and information on boat trips and other excursions.

Food is excellent at almost all the **tavernas**: *To Bogázi* has an unbeatable sea-front position and is run by a Greek-Swiss couple who produce interesting "specials" and some good vegetarian dishes; *Mesostrati* boasts traditional Cretan cuisine from family recipes, and also serves good breakfasts. Many places feature *achinosalata*, something of an acquired taste, made from the roe of the sea urchins that flourish in the clear, unpolluted water here (most people wear plastic shoes or flippers when they swim, sold at the local minimarkets). On the west side of the village, the appropriately named *Kafenío Heliobasilema* (Sunset Café) is a prime spot for a sundowner, open in the evenings only.



△ Móhlos islet

Accommodation

Numerous new places mean that you'll almost always be able to find a room in Móhlos, even though it's far busier than its isolated location would lead you to expect. Nevertheless, advance booking is recommended, particularly in July and August. Some of the rooms places at the back of the village are not immediately easy to find, especially as there are no street names, but the place is so tiny that in ten minutes you can have visited almost every house.

Aretousa ⓣ28430 94428. Pleasant, a/c en-suite rooms above a sea-front café as you enter the village. ③

Blue Sea ⓣ & ⓕ28430 94237, ⓔbluesea1@otenet.gr. A tempting option a kilometre or so east of the village along the Sfáka road, where welcoming proprietors offer sparkling a/c rooms and apartments with fridge, satellite TV and balcony overlooking the sea and small pool. Only problem is that the pool bar is a popular meeting place for locals, and music often goes on to the early hours. ③

Studios Despina Hilaki ⓣ28430 94344. Inland behind the village, slightly east of the *Hotel Sofia*, this place has spacious studios with balcony, kitchenette and fans. ③

Pension Hermes ⓣ28430 94074. Just behind the *Hotel Mochlos*, this has the village's cheapest rooms, with shared bath. ②

Apartments Limenaria ⓣ69774 45475, ⓦwww.mochlos-crete.gr. On a rise overlooking the bay 500m west of town, the *Limenaria* is a tranquil hideaway with fully equipped apartments sleeping up to four. ④

Pension Meltemi ⓣ28430 94200, ⓕ28430 94130. By the road as you enter the village, attractive studios with kitchenette and mosquito nets. ③

Hotel Mochlos ⓣ28430 94240, ⓦwww.mochloshotel.com. Set back slightly from the waterfront at the heart of the village, the *Mochlos* has a/c sea-view balcony rooms with fridge and kitchenette. ③

Mochlos Mare ⓣ28430 94005. East of town near the *Blue Sea*, in a tranquil garden setting; economical apartments with kitchen (a/c extra) for up to four people. ④

Hotel Sofia ⓣ28430 945548, ⓕ28430 94238. Friendly hotel with sea-view balcony rooms above its taverna with a/c, fridge and TV; also rents apartments nearby. ③

The islet

When the weather is calm it's a reasonably easy swim across to the **islet of Mohlós** – plenty of people do it – or you may be able to arrange a ride across with a local fisherman; ask at the seafront cafés. Inhabited from the Pre-Palatial period, in Minoan times this barren rock was almost certainly a much less barren peninsula, and the sandy spit linking it to the mainland would have been used as a harbour (anchorages which could be approached from either side were a great advantage for boats that could sail only before the wind). You can see remains of **late Minoan houses** on the south side of the island, and there are more below the current sea level where recent excavations have also identified remnants of the ancient harbour. But the important discoveries at Móhlos were in the much more ancient **tombs** built up against the cliff. Here, very early seal stones were found (including one from Mesopotamia), as well as some spectacular gold jewellery now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum and a fine collection of marble, steatite and rock crystal vases on display in the Áyios Nikólaos and Sitía archeological museums. An excellent website on the excavations and history of Mohlós, with coverage of the latest discoveries, is at ⓦwww.uncg.edu/~jssoles/Mochlos/first.html.

Psíra

The larger island of **Psíra**, off Móhlos, was also a Minoan port, and here the remains are of a town a little like Goúrnia but built amphitheatrically around a good natural harbour. As with the islet, you should be able to arrange a ride **by boat** from Móhlos over to Psíra with a fisherman, or there are occasional organized visits from Áyios Nikólaos (check with the tourist office there for details).

Like Móhlos, Psíra was first excavated in 1907 by an American, Richard Seager, who revealed a settlement which again was occupied from the early Minoan era. During the Neo-Palatial period, the community of merchants, sailors and fishermen shared in the general prosperity of the time. In one of a number of substantial dwellings – many containing hearths and with walls still standing up to two metres high in places – a fine relief **fresco** was found depicting female figures wearing richly embroidered dresses, the only known example outside Knossós. A long, stepped street climbs away from the harbour to the site. No palaces or obvious public buildings were discovered but the site has produced rich finds of **painted pottery**. One jar, now on display in the Iráklion Archeological Museum, is noted for its decoration of bulls' heads interspersed with the double-axe symbol. The remains of what is thought to be an ancient **well** have also been found, although the island is completely dry these days; even in ancient times, the islanders must have been heavily dependent on trade, with mainland Crete and further afield. The site was another of those destroyed about 1450 BC, though the Romans later used the island for strategic and navigational purposes, and you can still make out the remains of their **lighthouse** and military settlement on the island's crown.

East to Hamézi

From Móhlos to Sitía the road, lined with a riot of pink and white oleander flowers in summer, continues to toil through villages clinging to the mountainside until the final approach to the city and a descent in great loops through softer hills. As you progress, the familiar olive groves are increasingly interspersed with vineyards, and there are some fine and highly regarded local wines to be had in the village cafés, especially in **Mésa Moulianá** and its neighbour **Éxo Moulianá**. Wine, under the Agrilos label, is bottled in nearby Sitía. Most of the grapes, however, go to make sultanas: in late summer, when they are laid out to dry in the fields and on rooftops all around, the various stages of their slow change from green to gold to brown make a bizarre spectacle. A superb taverna, *Kefalovrisi*, occupies a shady spot in a small forest of plane trees just outside Mésa Moulianá – look out for the sign on the main road.

Of the other villages en route, **Mirsíni** has an attractive church built around and entirely enclosing a frescoed fourteenth-century chapel – you'll need to find the priest if you want to look inside (ask at the taverna below). Apart from the church, and a small pottery and weaving workshop, the village also boasts a good **taverna**, *Kathodon* (eves only), whose terrace has stunning views across the coast below.

Hamézi and around

Near the ruined stone windmills on the final crest before the Bay of Sitía, a track on the right signed "Middle Minoan House" indicates the ancient Minoan site of **Hamézi**. Follow the driveable, winding track (about a 15min walk), keeping right at a restored windmill, which will eventually lead you, after 2km, to a Minoan edifice with a spectacular hilltop setting.

Dating from the Pre-Palatial period (ca.2000 BC), this grey stone ruin has a unique importance in Minoan archeology, for it is the only known structure to have had an **oval** ground plan, possibly dictated by the conical shape of the hill. It was thought at first to be a peak sanctuary, but the discovery of a **cistern** made a dwelling, or even a fortress, seem more likely. The ground plan sketched out by the walls – more than a metre high in places – consists of a number of rooms grouped around a central courtyard, where the cistern is located. A paved entrance is visible on the south side. Whatever the building's function, it certainly had a commanding view over the surrounding terrain. While you're taking this in, keep an eye out for the rare **Eleanora's falcon**, which breeds on the offshore island of Paximádha – the valley to the east is one of its favourite hunting grounds.

Hamézi proper, a kilometre and a half further along the main Sitía highway, is a sleepy little village spreading uphill to the north of the road, where plants are festooned over buildings and down white-washed steps. The village's **folk museum** (daily 9am–1pm & 5–8pm; €1) is worth a visit – it has a collection of ancient farm implements and rooms filled with furniture and utensils from the nineteenth century. To get there, walk up the main street (don't try to bring a car up here), passing the brilliant white **church**, and turn left up a charming stepped street. To get onto the path through the Áyios Pándes gorge, ask for directions locally.

Moní Faneroméni

Further along the main Sitía road, just beyond the village of Skopí, you'll come to a track signed left (north) for the **Moní Faneroméni**. This partly asphalted five-kilometre track leads, via some alarming hairpin bends, to a picturesque rocky cove lapped by a turquoise sea. If you're coming from Sitía, you can join this route by following the signs down a narrow lane shortly after you leave the town. From the cove, the track climbs inland to the monastery.

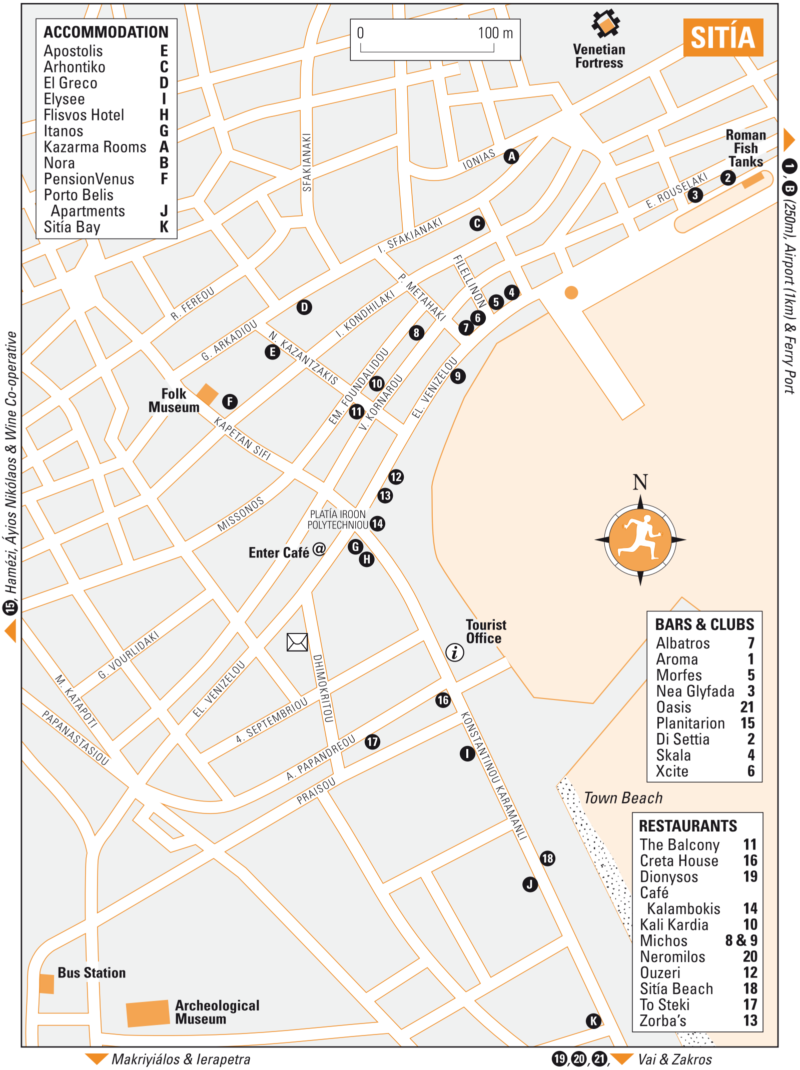
The charming **monastic church** stands at the heart of a tiny, isolated community, built into the rock on the very lip of a gorge. Standing as a metaphor for recent Cretan history, the church has been battered but still stands unbowed. In 1829, the monastery and tiny church were looted and burned by the Turks, and most of the frescoes destroyed. They're now blackened and graffitied, but the beauty of what was lost can be glimpsed in one remaining fragment depicting a saint reading. The three indentations across his face are bullet holes, again Turkish. Behind the church, shoals of silver *taxímata* (ex votos) hung on the icon of the Virgin in a small cave attest to the continuing importance of the shrine.

There are good **hiking** possibilities here too: a well-marked path leads from the coast (there's a parking area by the road), up the Áyios Pándes gorge beneath the monastery, and eventually to Hámezi, from where you should be able to get a bus back to Sitía. You can also walk to Sitía in two to three hours, or walk the whole way from Hámezi, via the gorge, to Sitía.

Sitía

After the excesses of Mália or Áyios Nikólaos, arriving in **SITÍA** can seem something of an anticlimax. But don't be fooled: the town's charms are subtle. Allow yourself to adjust to the more leisurely pace of life here and you may, like many other visitors before you, end up staying much longer than intended. An ideal base from which to visit the other attractions in the region, Sitía hasn't entirely escaped the tourist boom, and the increasing number of visitors attracted to the port has led to a great deal of new development at its fringes. Many of the new tourists are French or Italian (as they are, in fact, throughout the far east of Crete), a legacy perhaps of the French troops who garrisoned the place under the Great Power protection at the end of the nineteenth century, and the Italians who occupied it during World War II.

The town is set on a hill tumbling down towards the western end of the picturesque **Bay of Sitía**. Its oldest sections, hanging steeply above the harbour, look east over the bay and the long ribbon of new development along the coast. Life concentrates on the **waterfront**, around Platía Iróon Polytehníou in the corner of


SITÍA
ACCOMMODATION
Apostolis E
Arhontiko C
El Greco D
Elysee I
Flisvos Hotel H
Itanos G
Kazarma Rooms A
Nora B
PensionVenus F
Porto Belis Apartments J
Sitía Bay K
0 100 m
Venetian Fortress
Roman Fish Tanks
IONIAS
SFAKIANAKI
I. SFAKIANAKI
E. ROUSELAKI
R. FEREOU
G. ARKADIOU
N. KAZANTZAKIS
I. KONDHILAKI
P. METAHAKI
FILELLINON
EM. FOUNDALIDOU
V. KORNAROU
EL. VENIZELOU
Folk Museum
KAPETAN SIFI
MISSONOS
PLATÍA IROON POLYTECHNIOU
Enter Café @
Tourist Office
DHIMOKRITOU
G. VOURLIDAKI
M. KATAPOTI
PAPANASTASIOU
EL. VENIZELOU
4. SEPTEMBRIOU
A. PAPANDREOU
PRAISOU
KONSTANTINOU KARAMANLI
Town Beach
N
BARS & CLUBS
Albatros 7
Aroma 1
Morfes 5
Nea Glyfada 3
Oasis 21
Planitarion 15
Di Settia 2
Skala 4
Xcite 6
RESTAURANTS
The Balcony 11
Creta House 16
Dionysos 19
Café Kalambokis 14
Kali Kardia 10
Michos 8 & 9
Neromilos 20
Ouzeri 12
Sitía Beach 18
To Steki 17
Zorba's 13
Bus Station
Archeological Museum
⑮, Hamézi, Áyios Nikólaos & Wine Co-operative
①, B (250m), Airport (1km) & Ferry Port
Makriyiálos & Ierapetra
⑲, ⑳, ㉑, Vai & Zakros

the bay. North towards the port and ferry dock is a sea-front promenade crowded with the outdoor tables of rival tavernas, and beyond this a newly constructed promenade leads to the ferry port. South, the main road (officially Karamanlí but known simply as the Beach Road) runs behind the beach, flanked for miles by a rambling jumble of low-key development.

Some history

This area was settled, as Eteia, in Classical times but may be identified with the **Minoan** *se-to-i-ja* inscribed on clay tablets found locally. That there was a substantial Minoan presence in the area is borne out by the excavations at **Petrás**, the town's southern suburb, where a settlement dating to the early second millennium BC has been unearthed and where, in the later Neo-Palatial period, there was a fine town with sophisticated buildings and roads. Details concerning the subsequent Greek and Roman settlements are sketchy, although a substantial chunk of **Hellenistic Sitía** has recently been discovered on the outskirts. Apart from some tombs and fish tanks (now incorporated into an artificial pond on the harbour promenade), little tangible survives from the **Roman** town.

It was under the **Venetians** that the port really took off (they called it *La Sitia* – hence Lasíthi), as part of a conscious attempt to exploit the east of the island. For all their efforts, the area remained cut off by land from the rest of Crete and, although what was in effect a separate fiefdom developed here, it never amounted to a great deal. Perhaps the most significant event of this era was the birth of Vitzéntzos Kornáros, author of the epic Cretan poem the *Erotókritos*. More physical remains are few, due to earthquakes and the raids of **Barbarossa**. Where once there was a walled city, now you'll find only the barest remains of a fortress.

Arrival and information

The **bus station** (ⓣ28430 22272) lies on the southwest fringe of the centre close to the town's main **supermarket**. Although the station office has a left-luggage area of sorts, it's not entirely secure. Head north along Odhós Venizélou from here to reach the centre. **Ferry** arrivals from Áyios Nikólaos or the islands dock at the port at the northeastern end of town; it's a ten-minute walk along the new promenade (or two-minute taxi-ride) into the centre from here. Despite a recent upgrade and longer runway, the local **airport** sees almost exclusively domestic flights: it lies northwest of town, a taxi ride of only fifteen minutes or so.

The municipal **tourist office** (Mon–Fri 9am–2pm & 5–9pm, Sat 9am–2pm; ⓣ28430 28300, ⓦwww.sitia.gr) is located on the sea front along the Beach Road and can supply accommodation lists, town maps and general information on the town and province. The **tourist police** are at Míssonos 24 (daily 7.30am–2.30pm; ⓣ28430 24200).

Accommodation

Rooms are rather scattered, but except at the busiest times (usually the first half of August) you should be able to find something. Several old-fashioned rooms places, generally quiet and good value, can be found in the older streets leading up the hill from the waterfront, especially behind the OTE and in the nearby streets off Kápetan Sífi. Odhós Kondhiláki, which runs down the side of the OTE, has numerous possibilities. If you are at a loss where to begin there are a number of helpful travel agencies around the centre that can suggest possible options; try Porto Belis, Karamánli 34 (ⓣ28430 22370, ⓦwww.portobelis-crete.gr).

Apostolis Kazantzákis 27 ⓣ28430 22993. Pleasant, friendly and central; en-suite balcony rooms with fridges and fans. ②

Arhontiko Kondhiláki 16 ⓣ28430 28172. One of the best budget places in town, with attractive rooms and a mature orange tree in the front garden. One of the rooms is en suite. ②

El Greco G. Arkadhíou 13 ⓣ28430 23133, ⓕ28430 26391. Charming small hotel in the upper town, with en-suite balcony rooms with fridge, some with a/c and sea views (especially rooms 43 & 44). Also offers a/c studios and apartments sleeping up to five. Rates include breakfast. ③–④

Elysee Karamánli 14 ⓣ28430 22312, ⓦwww.elysee-hotel.gr. Attractive, small hotel on the seafront offering a/c sea-view balcony rooms with TV and fridge. ④

Flisvos Karamánli 4 ⓣ & ⓕ28430 27135, ⓦwww.flisvos-sitia.gr. Small hotel fronting the sea at the start of the Beach Road; modern a/c rooms with TV and fridge face either the sea or a patio garden behind. ④

Itanos Platía Iroon Polytehniou Ⓣ28430 22900, Ⓦwww.itanoshotel.com. Smart, upscale hotel on the town's main square with pleasant, a/c sea-view balcony rooms with TV. Rates include breakfast. ⑤

Kazarma Rooms Ionias 10, near the fortress Ⓣ69367 60988. Excellent en-suite studios and rooms, with use of communal kitchen. The proprietor lives off-site, so you're free to enter and choose your room; the details will be sorted later. ②

Nora Rouseláki 31 Ⓣ28430 23017, Ⓔnorahotel@yahoo.gr. Near the ferry port, this is a small and friendly female-run hotel, with fine views over the harbour and bay; all rooms have a/c, TV, balcony and shower. ②

Porto Belis Apartments Karamánli 34 Ⓣ28430 22370, Ⓦwww.portobelis-crete.gr. Studios and two-room apartments with kitchens for up to four people, plus some rooms. All are modern and well equipped, some have sea-view balconies though most look to the rear, over a small garden. ③

Sitia Bay Trítis Septemvríou 8 Ⓣ28430 24800, Ⓦwww.sitiabay.com. Luxurious new purpose-built apartment complex behind the town beach, with a large pool at the rear. Two-room apartments with kitchen for up to four people, and smaller studios, all with big, sea-view balconies. Substantial discounts out of season. ⑧

Pension Venus Kondhiláki 60 Ⓣ28430 24307. This comfortable place offers simple rooms and has an ebullient English-speaking owner. ②

The Town

Sitía is an absorbing place to wander around, doing nothing more than enjoying the atmosphere. The narrow streets behind the sea front feature the everyday scenes of a Cretan provincial town: villagers stocking up on news and necessities, and stores catering to their every conceivable need, from steel drums to wooden saddles, seed to pick-up trucks. While you're people-watching, one thing not to be missed, especially on Sundays, is the **volta**, when the whole town puts on its finery to parade in front of the neighbours. To see the show, get a seat around seven in the evening at a table adjacent to the road behind the waterfront.

By day, the summer heat will eventually draw you towards the water: the **town beach** is sandy if a little crowded, with clean water. Further out along the beach road windsurfers can be hired.

Aside from wandering the streets, sitting in the cafés or lying on the beach, there's a limited number of things to do. The prime attraction is the Archeological Museum (see below), but the **Folk Museum** (Mon–Sat 10am–2pm & 5–8pm; €2), in the centre of town at Kápetan Sífi 28, is also worth a visit, for an entertaining look at traditional life, with displays of textiles, clothes and antique furniture from the region. On the hill above the harbour lies the restored Kazarma or **Venetian fortress**, now used as an open-air theatre. Climbing down towards the port from here, you can see the ruined remains of some **Roman fish tanks**: freshly caught fish were kept in these semicircular constructions until they were needed. The tanks have been incorporated into an artificial **pond** along the concrete promenade leading to the harbour, and are used as a preening perch by the resident colony of swans, ducks and geese. The best view of them is from the terrace of the *Di Settia* bar/taverna which perches on the cliff above. The only other visitor attraction is the **Wine Co-operative**, Míssonos 74, on the road into town from Áyios Nikólaos; visits (Mon–Fri 9am–3pm, April–Oct also open most evenings and weekends – call to check on Ⓣ28430 29354; free) include a tour of the fermentation plant, a video on Cretan winemaking and a tasting session, with the possibility to buy local brands and the excellent olive oil that the co-operative also produces.

The Archeological Museum

The little-visited Archeological Museum (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €2), 400m south of the centre on the Ierápetra road, is a modern building surrounded by construction and new development. The east is particularly rich in peak sanctuaries and Minoan villas or country houses and the collection includes many finds from these, as well as from the palace at Zákros.

As you enter the museum, a display case holds the small **Palékastro koúros**, or male figure, discovered in the excavations at Palékastro (see p.207). Made from eight interlocking pieces of hippopotamus ivory and dating from ca.1500 BC, it is an extremely delicate work, and when complete would have been decorated with a gold Minoan belt, bracelets and shoes. Note that the left leg is placed slightly forward, following the Egyptian convention for the portrayal of this form of statue.

△ Kazarma Venetian fortress, Sitía

You veer left from here to enter the **main room** (proceeding clockwise), where finds from the early Minoan cemetery at nearby Ayía Fotiá are displayed, as well as some fine stone vases from Móhlos and its island neighbour, Psíra. There are also recent discoveries from Petrás, Sitía's southern suburb, where important buildings from the Minoan Neo-Palatial period have been unearthed. One large building there had a magazine for storing *píthoi* (the large earthenware jars), similar to that at Knossós, and many of these are displayed around the museum.

The **Zákros** section comes next: interesting exhibits here include a bronze saw and a winepress from a Minoan villa near the palace. Here too is a case full of rare **Linear A tablets**, discovered by archeologist Nikólaos Pláton in the archives room at the palace. Note how the Minoan characters have been delicately scratched into the soft clay. Some show evidence of being burned by the fire which destroyed the palace – in fact, it was the fire that preserved them, for as unbaked clay tablets they would have crumbled to dust. A nearby case illustrates the **domestic life** of the kitchen, the only one so far positively identified at any palace. Among the cooking pots and other utensils there's a superbly preserved terracotta grill, probably used for cooking some form of *souvláki* – a method used in the Greek world since pre-Mycenaean times and mentioned by Homer.

After the Hellenistic and Roman sections, don't miss the barnacle-encrusted tangle of **Roman pots** (probably from a wreck), preserved by placing it inside a fish tank of salinated water.

Eating

A line of enticing outdoor **tavernas** crowds the harbourfront, many displaying dishes and fresh fish to lure you in – most of these are very touristy, though, and can be expensive. For cheaper and often more interesting places to dine head away from the water, or to the less glamorous-looking places behind the town beach; there are a few good out-of-town possibilities too. For **fast-food and snacks** the block of Venizélou immediately east of Platía Iróon Polytehníou is the place to head, for places like *Stelios Yíros and Pizza*, and there are bakeries, food stores and more fast food nearby on Venizélou and parallel Kornárou.

The Balcony Foundalídhou 19, cnr Kazantzákis Ⓦwww.balcony-restaurant.com. Stylish restaurant on the upper floor of an elegant town house, with a menu that combines traditional Cretan dishes with Mexican- and Asian-influenced cuisine; expensive, but worth it.

Creta House Karamánli, opposite the *Hotel Flisvos*. Reliable, large and touristy traditional taverna, with a harbourside terrace.

Dionysos Ayía Fotiá. Located 4km east of Sitía on the edge of Ayía Fotiá, this is a good seafood taverna with a pleasant terrace near the sea; hard to miss, as it's fronted by a line of poles flying European flags.

Café Kalambokis Platía Iróon Polytehníou. Top-notch people-watching position for this upmarket patisserie/café, open all hours. Great cakes and ice cream, plus light meals, breakfasts, and cocktails or nightcaps.

Kali Kardia Foundalídhou 28. Not the most attractive setting, but you'll be mixing with the locals here and the popular "Good Heart" *ouzerí* lives up to its name in terms of its welcome. Excellent fish, cheese and snail *mezédhes* with a good house retsina to wash them down.

Michos Kornárou 117, plus a harbourside terrace in summer. Standard Greek dishes, especially charcoal grills, served up with strong local wine.

Neromilos Off the road to Ayía Fotiá, 4km east of Sitía. Housed in a converted ancient watermill high above the bay, this offers magnificent views as well as a good selection of *mezédhes* and grilled meat and fish. Take a taxi, as the road down can be pretty tortuous in the dark. Nearby in Roússa Ekklisía, there's another village taverna which does great charcoal roasts and also has a superb terrace view.

Ouzerí Venizélou, with a harbourside terrace next to *Zorba's*. The diametric opposite of its neighbour, this is a fashionable, modern, nameless *mezedhopolío/ouzerí* with a minimal menu in Greek only. Packed with locals from around 10pm onwards.

Sitia Beach Karamánli 28. Very good *mezédhes* and Greek dishes, and decent pizzas too, on a terrace overlooking the town beach. Noticeably less expensive than places round the harbour.

To Steki A. Papandreou 13. Opposite Knossós bike rental, this no-frills place is popular with locals for its *souvláki* and *mezédhes*. Good value.

Zorba's At the harbour. The biggest and most popular place on the sea front, with a great position and much more authentic food than you might expect from the touristy appearance.

Drinking, nightlife and entertainment

Sitía's nightlife, mostly conducted at an easy pace, centres around café-bars that turn the music up as the night wears on. These are mainly concentrated in two zones: up at the north end of Venizélou towards the Roman fish tanks, and out along the beach road.

The first group of **bars** includes *Albatros*, *Xcite*, *Morfes* and *Skala* – all on the sea front near the jetty – and the stylish *Nea Glyfada* a little further on above the duck pond. Above here, and entered from Rouselaki, *Di Settia* is a laid-back taverna and music bar with a garden. Beyond all of these, near the ferry terminal, *Aroma* is a summer-only outdoor café by day, and at night a chilled-out bar with plenty of dark corners. At the opposite end of town, the roof-garden of the *Hotel Itanos* has another laid-back late-night music bar, while further along the beach road, *Oasis* has a stylish sea-front terrace. For late-night **clubbing** from midnight on, look no further than the massive *Planitarion*, a kilometre or so out on the Áyios Nikólaos road. With a sliding glass roof and state-of-the-art technological gadgetry it draws in crowds from all over the east, and some big-name DJs.

Sitía's main cultural bash is the summer-long *Kornaria* **cultural festival** featuring concerts, dance and theatre by Greek and overseas participants. Many are held in the castle, and there are also "traditional feasts" staged in nearby villages – you can get details from the tourist office.

Listings

Airlines Olympic are at 4-Septémbriou 3 ☎28430 22270, just off Karamánli.

Banks and exchange There's a branch of the National Bank at the bottom of Odhós Sífi, facing *Platía* Iroon Polytechniou, with an ATM and cash-changing machines, and others around the same *platía* and inland along Venizélou.

Bike and car rental Several outlets for bikes are on Odhós A. Papandhréou off the Beach Road, the best of the bunch being Petras Moto (☎28430 24849 or 69778 35326). Club Cars, A. Papandhréou 8 (☎28430 25104 or 69775 50484), and Hermes, Karamánli 18 (☎28430 29655), are reliable for car rental.

Books and newspapers Arian Minimarket, Karamánli 22 (Beach Road), stocks foreign newspapers and a limited number of paperbacks and island guides.

Ferries Agents for ferry (and other) tickets are mostly on Kornárou, inland from the harbourfront. Try Tzortzakis (☎28430 25080), Kornárou 150, cnr Filellínon, or Akasti Travel, nearby at Metaxáki 4, cnr Kornárou.

Hospital Sitía's main hospital is just off the Áyios Nikólaos road on the town's western edge; ☎28430 24311.

Internet access *Enter Café*, Venizélou 99, across Platía Iróon Polytehníou from the *Hotel Itanos*.

Post office Dhimókritou 8 (Mon–Sat 8am–7.30pm).

Scuba diving Universal Dive at Kornárou 140 offer courses and general dives, mostly from beaches at the far east of the island.

Taxis There's a rank at the corner of the harbour by the *Hotel Itanos*, or ☎28430 22700.

The east: Vái and Palékastro

Vái beach, with its famous grove of palm trees and silvery sands, features alongside Knossós, the Lasíthi plateau and the Samariá gorge on almost every Cretan travel agent's list of excursions. For years it was a popular hang-out for backpackers, and that reputation still clings, despite the fact that the beach is now fenced off, populated with loungers, and jam-packed all summer. If you're planning to stay at this end of the island, **Palékastro** is a lovely small town, in easy reach of Vái and many less well-known beaches, as well as some of Crete's best windsurfing. There are also small **archeological sites** at Ítanos and Palékastro, as well as the ancient monastery of **Tóplou**, one of the most revered on the island.

Ayía Fotiá

From Sitía, the road runs along the beach, and 2km out of town a signed track on the left (marked "Archeological Site") leads 100m to a farm building where you can park, beyond which lie the recently discovered remains of **Hellenistic Sitía**. Dating from the third century BC and later, the remains so far unearthed are substantial, with easily identifiable ruins of dwellings, rooms and streets. The continuing excavations will no doubt add to all this in the years ahead.

The main road continues east, tracking a rocky, unexceptional coastline to the village of **Ayía Fotiá**, sited on a small cove that now supports a cluster of new development. Here, in 1971, the largest **Minoan graveyard** yet found in Crete was excavated, revealing over 250 chamber tombs from the early Pre-Palatial period. To reach the cemetery, keep your eyes peeled on the eastern edge of the village for a rough track descending sharply to the left almost opposite the *Taverna Panorama*. Alternatively, if you continue to the very end of the village, you'll come to a signed road on the left, which is probably the best route to take with transport. Both routes lead, after about 200m, to the fenced-off cemetery, close to the sea. Among the outstanding finds of vases, fish hooks, daggers and stone axes (now in the Sitía and Áyios Nikólaos archeological museums) were a number of lead amulets, which suggests that these early Minoans regarded lead as a precious metal, as well as silver.

Beyond the extraordinarily ugly *Dionysos Village* holiday complex, it's a relief to follow the road as it turns inland, climbing into deserted, gently hilly country, the slopes covered in thyme, heather and sage with the occasional cluster of strategically sited beehives. In summer, the sweet-scented, deep violet thyme flowers prove an irresistible attraction for the bees that feed on them almost exclusively and thus create the much sought-after *thimárisio* (thyme honey).

The Monastery of Tóplou

Not long after the main road leaves the coast a side road switchbacks steeply up to the left, signed to Vái and the **Monastery of Tóplou** (daily 9am–6pm; €2.50). As you approach, the monastery looks more like a fortress, standing defiant in landscape that is empty, save for a line of wind turbines along the ridge behind. The name Tóplou is Turkish for "with a cannon" – a reference to a giant device with which the monks used to defend themselves and uphold the Cretan monastic traditions of resistance to invaders. They needed it: the monastery was sacked by pirates and destroyed in 1498, and in the 1821 rebellion it was captured by the Turks, who hanged twelve monks from the gate as an example. In World War II, it again served as a place of shelter, this time for the resistance. The opening above the main gate harks back to troubled times: the monks hurled missiles and boiling oil through it onto those attempting to gain entry.

Its forbidding exterior and grim history notwithstanding, Tóplou is startlingly beautiful within. It has a flower-decked, cloister-like **courtyard** with stairways leading up to arcaded walkways, off which are the cells. The blue-robed monks keep out of the way of visitors as far as possible, and in quieter periods their cells and refectory are left discreetly on view. And in the **church** is one of the masterpieces of Cretan art, the eighteenth-century **icon** *Lord Thou Art Great* by Ioánnis Kornáros. This is a marvellously intricate work, incorporating 61 small scenes full of amazing detail, each illustrating and labelled with a phrase from the Orthodox prayer which begins "Lord, thou art great…". There's a small **museum**, too, with more fine icons, and a shop where you can buy expensive reproductions of the famous icon, as well as postcards, books, the monastery's own olive oil and tacky souvenirs.

As you leave the church, take a look at the **inscription** set into the exterior wall. It records an arbitration by Magnesia, a city in Asia Minor, dating from the second century BC, concerning a territorial dispute between nearby Ítanos and Ierápytna (modern Ierápetra). At this time, when the Romans held sway over Crete, these deadly rivals clashed constantly, and finally Rome, unable to placate the two, called in the Magnesians to act as honest brokers. The inscription records part of their judgement (in favour of Ítanos) and was placed in the monastery wall at the suggestion of the English traveller and antiquarian Robert Pashley, who found it being used as a gravestone in 1834.

The monastery is reputed to be incredibly wealthy – it owns most of the north-eastern corner of the island – and this is no doubt how they can afford the endless and extensive restorations which seem set to destroy the romance of the place (the sheer weight of visitor numbers doesn't help either). Beyond Tóplou, the road descends towards Vái through the same arid, rock-strewn landscape as before. There's a chance here that you could spot the rare **Eleonora's falcon**, which breeds on the Dionysádes islands to the north – Tóplou and Cape Sídero s (a closed military zone) are its regular hunting grounds.

Vái

The beach at **Vái**, famous above all for its **palm trees**, makes for a thoroughly secular contrast to the spiritual tranquillity of Tóplou – and the sudden appearance of what is claimed to be Europe's only indigenous wild date-palm grove (the palms here are a local species, present on the island for millennia) is indeed an exotic shock. As you lie on the fine sand in the early morning, especially in early spring or late autumn, the dream of Caribbean islands is hard to dismiss.

During the summer months, however, the beach fills to overflowing as buses – public ones from Sitía and tours from all over the island – pour into the **car park** (€2.50), and cars unable to squeeze in park along the access road for hundreds of metres. On the beach itself, only the boardwalks guarantee a route through the mass of baking bodies, sun loungers are expensive if you can get one, and a watersports centre offers water skiing, ringos and other high-speed rides. There's a café and taverna – pricey once you've endured the long queues – and you'll pay again to have a shower or use the toilet. Having endured all this you may just, for a couple of hours at each end of the day, be able to enjoy Vái the way it ought to be. Alternatively, avoid the high season if you can. For a bit more peace you can climb the steps cut into the rock behind the taverna to the less shaded cove to the south or, with rather more difficulty, clamber over the rocks to the north, and join thriving little communities at either.

The only **accommodation** close to the beach is *Metohi Vai Village* (☎69732 11051, Ⓦwww.palaikastro.com/metohivai; ④), on the Palékastro road about fifteen minutes' walk away. Owned by Tóplou monastery, this new complex of three rooms and three apartments occupies old shepherds' shelters which have been converted to a high standard with air conditioning, satellite TV and cooking facilities throughout; it's very isolated, though. Otherwise the nearest beds are around Palékastro (see below). People still **camp rough** in the surrounding area too, despite the signs warning that this is against the law (within the confines of the national park that protects the palm trees, the rules are strictly enforced).

Ítanos

The sand may not be as good, but the relative emptiness of the three small beaches at **Ítanos**, 1.5km north of the turning to Vái, makes them far more enjoyable. There's still the odd palm tree scattered around here, and you can explore the remains of the **ancient city** too. Inhabited from Minoan times, Ítanos became important later, flourishing through the Classical Greek and Roman eras, when it vied with Ierápytna (modern Ierápetra) for control of eastern Crete. One twenty-year squabble between these two led to the arbitration of Magnesia in 132 BC, part of the stone record of which is preserved at Tóplou Monastery (see opposite). The settlement here remained prosperous until the medieval Byzantine era, when it was destroyed, most likely by Saracen pirates. All sorts of messy ruins strewn with potsherds survive beneath the twin acropoli, but little that retains any shape. There are two early **basilicas** you might be able to make out, as well as the beautifully cut lower courses of a **Hellenistic wall** on the western hill.

There are no facilities at Ítanos, so come prepared, especially if you plan to head further north on the road signed "to the Naval Base". This is the military base that occupies the tip of **Cape Síderos**, 5km to the north. Although the cape and the base itself are off limits, you can drive some way up the excellent asphalted road there, across a wild and craggy peninsula where there are coves with tempting beaches and some likely places to snorkel. Don't use a camera in this zone – the Greeks are ultra-sensitive when it comes to military installations.

Palékastro

PALÉKASTRO, 9km south of Vái, is a large farming village with easy access to numerous local beaches. With plenty of accommodation both in town and in the surrounding area, some excellent tavernas and just about every other facility you could need, it makes an excellent, quiet base. They work hard at making visitors welcome here, and there's a very helpful **tourist office** (Mon–Fri 9am–1pm & 2.30–9pm, Sat 10am–1pm & 5.30–9pm; ☎28430 61546) on the Sitía road 50m from the main square; they have extensive information on the surrounding area and will help with finding rooms or apartments as well as offering **exchange** facilities. There are also a couple of locally run websites (see "Accommodation" on p.206) with more details of local attractions.

Almost everything you might need is gathered around or close to the main square; an ATM, several mini-markets, many of which sell books, a bakery (just off the square on the Vái road) and more (even a launderette). One particularly good shop is Art et Lumiere, not far from the square on the road signed to Zákros and Hioná. Here Virginie and Manolis sell high-class souvenirs (many featuring Manolis's local photography), books and a good selection of foreign papers, as well as offering fast **Internet** access (also available at several other places including the *Hotel Hellas*). On the eastern edge of the village along the Vái road, Moto Kastri (☎28430 61477) rents out **scooters** – handy for reaching the more remote beaches.

The only sight in town is an interesting **folk museum** (Mon–Sat 10am–1pm & 5–8.30pm; €1.50) housed in a restored traditional cottage signed off the Sitía road a little beyond the tourist office. Inside, rooms are decorated with period furnishings, and there are the usual displays of tools and agricultural equipment.

Almost without exception, the **tavernas** in Palékastro seem to be excellent. Right on the main square, the restaurant of the *Hotel Hellas* is particularly good, with locally grown produce and a number of vegetarian options; home-produced *thimárisio* (thyme honey) and olive oil are on sale at the minimarket next door. *Mythos*, opposite, is also worth a try. There's even a bit of **nightlife** here – *Sticky Minds* café-bar opens in the evening, with music on an outdoor terrace, and there's a disco, *Design*, 100m or so from the square on the Vái road.

Accommodation in and around Palékastro

As well as plenty of rooms in Palékastro itself (you'll see signs throughout the village), there are a score or more small apartment complexes in the surrounding countryside and at the nearby beaches. The tourist office has comprehensive lists, and many are represented either on Ⓦwww.palaikastro.com (with online reservations) or Ⓦwww.eastern.cretefamilyhotels.com. In late July and August it gets very busy here, so advance booking is advisable.

Grandes Apartments Koureménos beach Ⓣ28430 61496. Small group of simple a/c apartments, 70m from the beach, with attractive terraces and separate kitchen area. The owners run one of the beachfront tavernas. ④

Hotel Hellas On the main square Ⓣ28430 61240, Ⓦwww.palaikastro.com. Well-equipped a/c rooms come with balcony, TV and fridge, and there are reductions for longer stays. ③

Itanos on the main square Ⓣ28430 61205. Simple en-suite rooms above the taverna of the same name. ②

Kouremenos Beach Apartments Immediately behind Koureménos beach Ⓣ28430 61577, Ⓦwww.palaikastro.com. A couple of small apartments for two as well as as some larger ones for up to six people, all with a/c, TV and fridge, the larger ones with separate kitchen. ③–⑤

Haus Margot 100m from the square on the Hioná road Ⓣ28430 61277, Ⓦwww.crete-vacation.com. Two adjoining houses contain a variety of inexpensive accommodation in a garden setting, from a couple of small, plain rooms with shared bath, to much larger, en-suite, a/c balcony rooms with fridges. Clean, friendly and good value. ①–②

Marina Village Between Hioná and Koureménos beaches, though closer to former Ⓣ28430 61284, Ⓦwww.palaikastro.com. Hotel with bungalow-style accommodation, all with a/c, TV and fridge, plus pool and tennis court. Breakfast included. ⑤

Rooms Nikos Up a side street off the Vái road, not far from the centre Ⓣ28430 61123, Ⓔaptsnikos@yahoo.gr. A quiet position on the edge of the village for these rooms and apartments: en-suite, balcony rooms are in the older building; large apartments with kitchen, balcony and a fine view in a purpose-built block behind. ②–④

Hotel Palekastro 100m from the square on the Sitía road Ⓣ28430 61235. Don't be misled by the drab exterior: to the rear is a courtyard with pleasant balcony rooms with a/c and TV. ③

Porto Helli apartments 1km out of town, on the Vái road Ⓣ28430 61275, Ⓦwww.palaikastro.com. Two-room apartments with a/c, TV and well-equipped kitchens, sleeping up to five. Friendly proprietor, and terraces overlooking a tranquil garden. ⑤

Rooms Senie On the Vái road Ⓣ28430 61414, Ⓔsenie@in.gr. Central place with a/c en-suite rooms with fridge. ②

Taverna Vaios Angáthia Ⓣ28430 61403. Excellent taverna that has a couple of pleasant sea-view balcony rooms with bath; they have some nearby luxury apartments too equipped with a/c, garden and balcony sea views. There are half a dozen other rooms places in this tiny village. ②–④

Angáthia and Palékastro's beaches

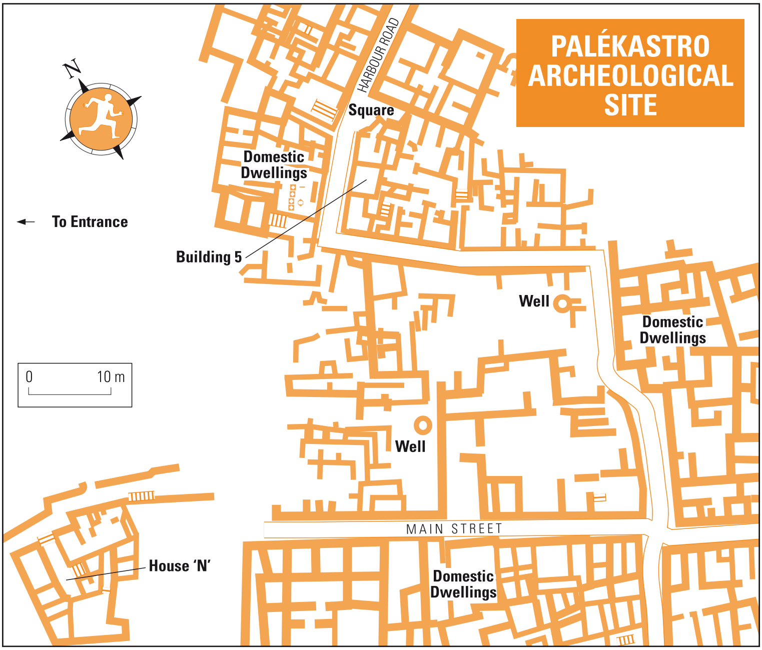
A number of excellent beaches are within easy reach of Palékastro. Closest is Hioná, almost due east via the hamlet of **Angáthia**. Smaller and even quieter than its neighbour (there are good rooms and tavernas, little else), Angáthia is barely ten minutes' walk from Palékastro, fifteen from **Hioná beach**. A good stretch of EU blue-flagged pebble and sand, Hioná is the busiest local strand, though still far from crowded. Palékastro archeological site (see opposite) is immediately behind and there are numerous **tavernas**, the best of which is *Taverna Batis,* with a seafront terrace near the little harbour at the northern end of the beach. To the south, a rough track follows the coast past more lovely little beaches, where for most of the year you can easily claim a cove to yourself. About 200m down this track on the right, a path (signed "Peak Sanctuary") will take you to the nearby **Petsofas peak** – a pleasant three-kilometre hike. This was the site of a Minoan peak sanctuary, and the view from the summit gives you a great overview of the ancient Minoan town and harbour.

North of Hioná, beyond the flat-topped hill of Kastrí, lies **Koureménos beach**, one of Crete's top **windsurfing** spots. Not surprisingly, it can be windy here (a funnel effect creates ideal windsurfing conditions; Hioná is far more sheltered), but it's a very pleasant, long sandy beach, with several tavernas and rooms places – even a bar – directly behind. There's also quite a community of camper vans here in summer. An excellent windsurf centre, *Freak* (Ⓦwww.freak-surf.com), rents equipment for all levels by the hour, day or week and offers lessons and other activities. The **tavernas** all seem good, with shady outdoor terraces: try *Anediasma* or *Grandes*. You can get to Koureménos on a sandy track from Hioná, but if you're starting from Palékastro head out on the Vái road and follow the signs; again, it's a bare thirty-minute walk.

Further north still, several more small beaches lie off the Vái road. The most easily accessible of these is **Maridati**, signed down a side road. Mostly pebbly, with a few trees for shade, it's a tranquil spot with a welcoming taverna.

Palékastro ancient site

The Minoan site of **Palékastro** (free; usually unlocked in daylight hours) is well signed close to Hioná beach, about twenty minutes' walk from Palékastro village.



For archeologists this is a very significant excavation, the largest Minoan town yet discovered and the source of much information about everyday Minoan life. It is an obvious site to settle, a broad and fertile agricultural plain set on an excellent bay beneath the protection of the high, flat-topped bluff of Kastrí – and indeed the area was extensively inhabited both before and after the Minoan era. Whilst much of the site may seem disappointing for the casual visitor when compared with the spectacular palace sites elsewhere on the island, the fact that the archeological excavations continue here means that new finds are still coming to light. Recent excavations on the site's northern side, for example, have revealed a road leading from the town to the nearby harbour (no trace of which has yet been found).

The site is dotted with deep wells, so superbly constructed that they still contain water today. In a complex of streets, dwellings and small squares around the harbour road lies Building 5, where archeologists discovered the **Palékastro koúros**, a stunning ivory statuette now in the Sitía museum. To the south of here the limestone-paved "main street" was the town's principal artery; around it a number of impressive dwellings with stone walls and column bases have been revealed, and the fine, Marine-style vases found in the ruins of some of them are evidence of the status and wealth of the owners. House N, at the site's western end, is dated to the late Neo-Palatial period, and excavations revealed horns of consecration and double-axe stands which had fallen from a shrine room on an upper floor. The room at the rear produced hundreds of cups as well as jars and cooking pots, suggesting that it may have been some form of communal eating club, or perhaps an early taverna.

Beneath the olive groves on the south and west sides of the site, more of the Minoan town lies waiting to be revealed – recent geophysical surveys have indicated the existence of a very large building, maybe a palace.

Zákros and the far southeast

From Palékastro to **Zákros**, a winding road offers a beautiful drive through countryside where the soil is a strange pinkish-purple colour, as if indelibly stained with grape juice (although actually it's olives which grow around here). For a fine **gorge walk**, make a stop at **Hohlakiés** (with buses to and from Áno Zákros and Palékastro), where you can follow the Hohlakiés gorge 3km to the Karoúmes Bay and beach. From here, you can either return to Hohlakiés or strike out north along the coast and eventually back to Palékastro, 5km further.

Beyond Hohlakiés, the few hamlets you pass along the way are so small that they make Zákros – or more properly Áno Zákros – seem positively urban when finally you get there. Beyond Áno Zákros lies **Káto Zákros**, a tiny seaside village shoehorned into the narrow space between the beach and the important **Minoan palace** behind it.

Áno Zákros

A slow-moving little country town, **ÁNO ZÁKROS** ("Upper" Zákros) boasts three or four tavernas around its central square which, throughout the summer at weekends, host numerous wedding feasts accompanied by dancing to *bouzoúki* and *lyra*; should you arrive then, you'll most likely have a glass of wine thrust into your hand by one of the multitude of smartly dressed revellers filling the square. The little trade these establishments see the rest of the time, however, is almost exclusively passing through, since Káto ("Lower") Zákros and the celebrated palace are on the coast 8km further southeast. Locally, Zákros enjoys a certain

FOR EXPERIENCED
TREKKERS ONLY
This path is leading to
the ruins of a Minoan
Castle named Castelas
Be cautious

△ Gorge of the Dead, Zákos

fame for the numerous **springs** that feed the lush vegetation hereabouts and that were also an attraction for the Minoans. If you follow the sign up to the right as you come into the town, or simply climb the hill from the centre, you'll reach a little **chapel** from where, in five minutes' walk, a path leads beside the stream to its source and some pleasant, shady picnic spots. Information on how to get to it or to reach the start of the "Valley of the Dead" walk (see p.210) is available from the town's small central **hotel**, the *Zakros* (Ⓣ & Ⓕ28430 93379; ②), whose rather plain air-conditioned rooms have fridge and TV; those at the back have good views over the gorge behind. Guests here are entitled to free trips to Káto Zákros in the hotel's minibus; alternatively if you walk the gorge, the minibus will return you to Áno Zákros. The town has a few **tavernas**, among which *Napoleon* (near the Shell petrol station on the Káto Zákros road) and *Erotokritos* (by the war memorial) are recommended.

Leaving the village by the Káto Zákros and Xerókambos road, you'll soon pass the remains of a **Minoan villa** dating from the late Neo-Palatial period (ca.1500 BC); here, a wine-press was discovered, which is now in the Sitía Archeological Museum.

The Gorge of the Dead

There are plenty of ways to get to Káto Zákros, but perhaps the most satisfying is to walk, in about two hours altogether, via a beautiful ravine known as the **Gorge of the Dead**. This path is also the final stage of the E4 trans-European footpath, so it's pretty well marked, at least once you get out of the village. The easiest way to get on to it is to follow the signs from the south end of the village, opposite the *Napoleon* taverna. Alternatively there's a parking place beside the road about halfway to Káto Zákros from where a steep path plunges down into the gorge, cutting off about half the distance but still giving you the most spectacular portion of the hike.

Leaving from the village, the first half hour or so is through olive groves and lovingly tended smallholdings, gradually becoming lonelier and wilder as the valley closes in. The trail for the most part is easy to follow beside the stream bed, marked by the usual red waymarks and the occasional signpost in case of confusion. It's a solitary but magnificent walk, brightened especially in spring by plenty of plant life. High in the cliff walls you'll see the mouths of **caves**: it is these, used as tombs in Minoan times and earlier, which give the ravine its name. At the bottom you join a dirt road, which runs through groves of bananas and olives and into Káto Zákros past the palace.

Káto Zákros

The easy way to Káto Zákros is on a good road that winds spectacularly down to approach the small bay from the south. Although in summer a couple of daily **buses** do run all the way down, most transport still stops in the upper village; there are taxis for the final stretch, or plenty of tourists if you want to try hitching. From the first spectacular view as you approach along the clifftop road, **KÁTO ZÁKROS** is a delight. There's a pebbly sand beach, a line of tavernas and a bar facing it, and a few places offering rooms and apartments; along with a tiny harbour with a few fishing boats, this is about all the place amounts to. It's best to bring cash and anything else you might need: there's a cardphone kiosk on the seafront and they'll change money and offer local information in the tavernas, but there's no shop, or anything else much. If it's laid-back tranquillity you're after, you've come to the right place.

You'll have passed a number of **accommodation** options on the way down, some perched high above the coast with spectacular views. But to be in easy walking distance of the beach, palace and tavernas you're better off continuing into the village where there are some older rooms places right by the beach and a number of more modern apartment blocks scattered inland on the track that heads past the palace. If you have trouble finding somewhere, and August can be very busy, then the various waterfront tavernas act as agents for many of the local places: Nikos at the *Taverna Akrogiali* (☎28430 26893, Ⓦwww.katozakros.sitiarealestate.com) is particularly helpful, and also in charge of the sea-front rooms at 🏃 *Poseidon* (shared bath ①, en-suite ③) – very basic, but a stunning, quiet location on a rocky outcrop with spectacular sea views – *Coral* (☎28430 26886; ③), with just three comfortable, en-suite rooms with terrace over the sea, and *Athena* (③), immediately behind but still with sea views from studios with air conditioning and fridge. Heading inland for about 500m, *Ianni's Retreat* (☎697234673; ④), *George's Villas*

(☎2843026883; ⑤) and 🏃 *Stella's Traditional Apartments* (☎2843023739, ⓦwww.stelapts.com; ⑥) are adjacent businesses run by three siblings, sharing verdant gardens and lovely views, all exceptionally well equipped, well run and friendly. The price reflects the facilities, from air-conditioned studios with kitchen and fridge at *Ianni's*, to rather larger apartments with terraces at *George's*, to large, elegantly decorated apartments at *Stella's*, with hammocks and tables in the gardens for your use. You can enquire about all three at sea-front *Taverna Glaros*.

For **eating and drinking** you've a simple choice of half a dozen places along the sea front, all good; 🏃 *Akrogiali* has excellent food and a particularly pleasant waterfront terrace away from the road; *Glaros* specialises in charcoal grills, including *souvláki* and *yíros*.

The Palace of Zákros

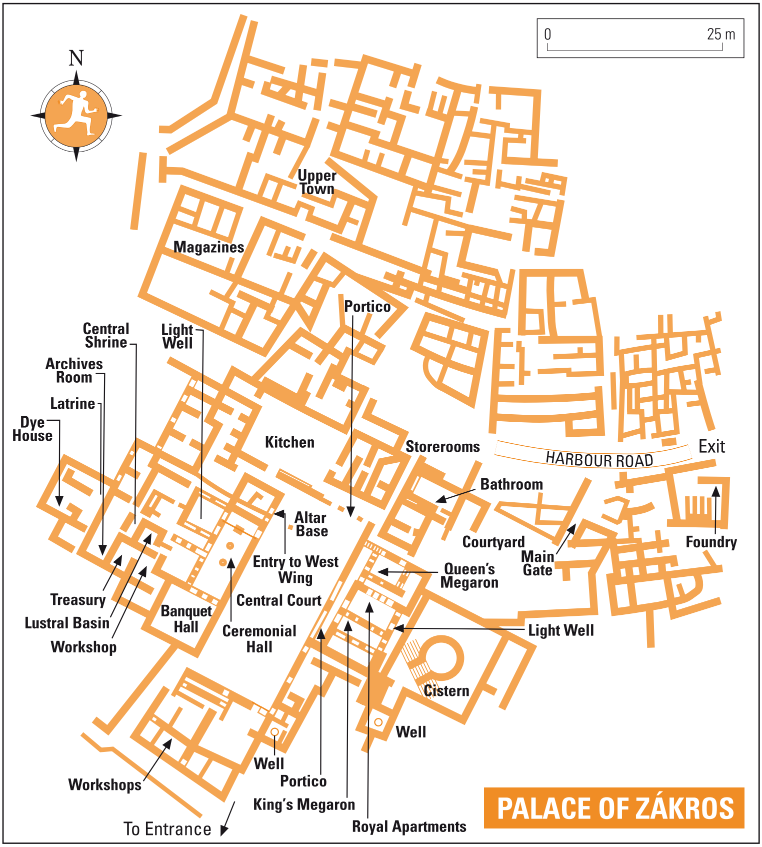
The valley behind Káto Zákros was explored by a British archeologist, David Hogarth, at much the same time as the other great Cretan palaces were being discovered, around the turn of the century. But Hogarth gave up the search, having unearthed only a couple of Minoan houses, and it was not until the 1960s that new explorations were begun by a Cretan archeologist, Nikólaos Pláton. Pláton found the palace almost immediately, just yards from where Hogarth's trenches ended. The **Palace of Zákros** (daily 8am–5pm; €3) thus benefited from modern techniques in its excavation and, having been forgotten even locally, it was also unlooted. The site yielded an enormous quantity of treasures and everyday items, including storerooms with all their giant *píthoi* still in place and a religious treasury full of stone vases and ritual vessels.

For the amateur, Zákros is also full of interest, and much easier to understand than many of the other Minoan sites. Here, the remains are of one palace only, dating from between 1600 and 1450 BC. Although there is an earlier settlement at a lower level, it is unlikely ever to be excavated – mainly because this end of the island is gradually sinking. The water table is already almost at the palace level, and anything deeper would be thoroughly submerged. Even the exposed parts of the palace are marshy and often waterlogged: there are terrapins living in the green water in the cistern. When it's really wet, you can keep your feet dry and get an excellent view of the overall plan of the palace by climbing the streets of the **town** which occupied the hill above it.

Though the palace is a small one, it can match any of the more important Minoan centres for quality of construction and materials. And it is unique in the way that so much of the town – a place very like Gourniá (p.189) – can still be discerned all around. The original destruction of the palace appears to have been a very violent one, with only enough time for the inhabitants to abandon it, taking almost nothing with them. This again contributed to the enormous number of artefacts found here, but more importantly the nature of the destruction, in which the palace was flattened and burnt, is an important prop in the theory that it was the explosion of Thíra which ended the Minoan civilization. Large lumps of **pumice** found among the ruins are supposed to have been swept there by the tidal wave which followed the eruption. However, many archeologists take issue with this hypothesis and question both its chronological accuracy and the type of destruction, seeing the palace's demise as more consistent with human than natural causes.

The entrance

A paved road led from the site to its harbour, the chief reason why a palace existed here at all. The harbour installations have disappeared beneath the sea, but two


N
0
25 m
Upper Town
Magazines
Portico
Central Shrine
Light Well
Archives Room
Latrine
Dye House
Kitchen
Storerooms
HARBOUR ROAD
Exit
Bathroom
Altar Base
Courtyard
Foundry
Entry to West Wing
Main Gate
Queen's Megaron
Central Court
Treasury
Lustral Basin
Workshop
Banquet Hall
Ceremonial Hall
Light Well
Cistern
Well
Well
Portico
Workshops
King's Megaron
To Entrance
Royal Apartments
PALACE OF ZÁKROS

large houses excavated along the road are enough to show that this must have been a significant port, the first landfall on Crete for trade from Egypt, the Nile Delta and the Middle East. Among the ruins were found ingots of copper imported from Cyprus, elephant tusks from Syria, and gold and precious materials from Egypt.

The **site entrance** is on the south side, but the following description starts on the east where the harbour road came into the palace, leading directly towards the main gateway. Here, before entering the palace proper, the road passed various dwellings on each side as well as the remains of a **foundry** dating from the Old Palace period, beneath a protective canopy on the left. The road (part of which has been reconstructed) then curves round into the town, passing the palace entrance on the left.

Entering the **palace**, the **main gate** leads to a stepped ramp, followed by a **courtyard** which may have served as a meeting place between the palace hierarchy and the townspeople. Here, in the northeast corner beneath another canopy, is a **bathroom** where visitors to the palace may have been required to wash or purify themselves before proceeding further. To the west of the courtyard lies the main or **Central Court**, a little over 30m by 12m, or about a third the size of that at Knossós. Crossing the north edge of the court, you come to an **altar base**, with the lower courses of the west-wing wall in grey ashlar stone beyond.

The west wing

The west wing (actually the northwest, as Zákros is not truly aligned north–south) is entered between two pillars and this is where, as usual, the chief ceremonial and ritual rooms were located. A **reception room** leads into a colonnaded **light well**, the hallmark of Minoan architecture. The light well's black stone crazy paving survives, as do the pillar bases and a drain in the northwest corner. It was here that the excavators unearthed what is arguably Zákros's single most important find: the **Peak Sanctuary Rhyton**, a carved stone vase depicting a peak sanctuary with wild goats, from which valuable information about Minoan religion was gleaned. The light well illuminated the **Ceremonial Hall**, beyond which lay the **Banqueting Hall**, originally a lavish room with frescoed walls and an elaborate floor. Pláton gave the room this name because of the large number of cups and drinking vessels discovered scattered about the floor.

At the heart of a complex of rooms behind the Banqueting Hall is the **Central Shrine** (with a canopy) which contains a ledge and niche, similar to the shrine at Gourniá, where idols would have been placed. Nearby is the **lustral basin**, necessary for purification before entering the shrine. Here, too, was the **Treasury**, probably the most important discovery from the excavators' viewpoint as it is the only one so far positively identified. In a number of box-like compartments (which have been partially restored), almost a hundred fine stone jars and libation vessels were discovered, including the exquisite rock-crystal rhyton – crushed into more than three hundred fragments – with its delicate crystal bead handle and collar that the Iráklion Archeological Museum is so proud of.

Next to the Treasury, in the **Palace Archive**, hundreds of Linear A record tablets had been stored in wooden chests. Sadly, only a handful of the top layers survived the centuries of rain and flooding; the rest had solidified into a mass of grey clay, depriving the archeologists of potentially priceless clues in their attempts at deciphering the script. On the opposite side of the treasury is a **workshop** where pieces of raw marble and steatite were found. The remaining stone slabs most likely supported a craftsman's workbench. More workshops and storerooms lay to the west of the shrine, and one of these has been identified as a **dye-house**. And if you were wondering where the occupants of this end of the palace answered the call of nature, a **lavatory** with a cesspit outside the wall was found nearby. Further west, beyond the palace confines, new excavations are still going on.

The rest of the site

On the north side of the Central Court was the palace **kitchen**, the first to be positively identified at any of the palaces. Bones, cooking pots and utensils were found strewn around the floor both here and in the storeroom or pantry next door. The south wing was devoted to **workshops**: for smiths, lapidaries, potters and even, according to Pláton, perfume-makers – possibly a borrowing from Egypt. The **well** that serviced this area still flows with drinkable water, and an offering cup was found close by, containing olives preserved by the waters. Pláton and his team devoured the 3500-year-old olives, which shrivelled upon contact with the air, and said that they tasted as fresh as those in the nearby tavernas.

Two large rooms regarded as **royal apartments** flank the east side of the Central Court behind a portico. The larger of the two, to the south, is called the King's Room and the smaller claimed to be that of the queen. However, one of these may have been the throne room, and there would have been elaborate rooms on the upper floor, possibly with verandas overlooking the courtyard below where the rulers may have lived. Next to a light well in the eastern wall of the King's Room lay the colonnaded **Cistern Hall** which, with eight steps leading down to the water contained in a plaster-lined basin, may have served as a royal aquarium or even a swimming pool (if so, the only one known). It is ingeniously designed to maintain the water at a constant level, with the excess draining into the well to the south, which, being outside the palace wall, was probably used by the townsfolk. The water from the spring was, as at Knossós, piped throughout the palace, and traces of the pipework can still be seen.

Beyond these royal apartments lay other **residential areas**, but much has been destroyed by centuries of ploughing combined with frequent waterlogging of the land here. In the steep **upper town** more survives and, close to the perimeter fence, a **narrow street** running east to west passes an impressive doorway and gives you some idea of how the town may have looked when twin-storey buildings overlooked these narrow thoroughfares. Quite a few grindstones found in the excavations are to be seen here, and nearby there's also a charming **stone bench**, now exposed but that would have looked into a light well. It's not hard to imagine someone sitting and enjoying the cool shade of a summer evening. Near to the bench, there's a well-preserved stairway climbing a couple of metres and tantalizingly continuing its climb to the now disappeared second storey. Both the stairway and the bench are close to the perimeter fence on the eastern (or seaward) side of the upper town. The quarry from where the tufa limestone used to build the palace was taken has now been discovered at nearby Pelekita, 3km to the north.

Xerókambos and the southeast

Few tourists venture south of Zákros, and indeed there's little in the way of habitation in the whole of the southeastern corner of the island, nor any public transport whatsoever. In recent years many of the roads have been paved, so change may be coming, but for the moment a little effort is rewarded with a barren, empty landscape and numerous excellent **beaches** – mostly deserted. Beyond Xerókambos you can circle back round to Sitía, or on towards the south coast, taking in an archeological site at Présos along the way.

Xerókambos and around

Work to pave the road from Áno Zákros to Xerókambos was still incomplete (and several years behind schedule) at the time of writing, but must surely be completed in 2007. Along the way, agricultural country of olive groves and giant greenhouses gradually gives way to a harsher mountain environment until finally you emerge high above the coast, and a brilliant turquoise sea and white sandy beaches divided by rocky outcrops appear below.

Tucked in the lee of the Sitían mountains that rise threateningly behind, the tiny hamlet of **Xerókambos** is not especially attractive, but it's as isolated and peaceful as you could wish for. The settlement straggles over a little coastal plain, with rooms and apartment places scattered along the road and down by the main beach; there's no real centre, just a street along which, between fields, are spaced some houses, a few tavernas and a couple of minimarkets selling basic food. There are a dozen or more apartment and **rooms** places in the vicinity, and the tavernas have information and keys for many of them if no-one is available; details of all those below (except the *Liviko View*) can be found on Ⓦwww.xerocamboscreta.com. The Greek-Australian-run *Liviko View* (Ⓣ28430 27001; ②) lies off the main street, has rooms with air conditioning and balcony, sea view, plus apartments (④) sleeping up to four. The cooking here – with organic ingredients grown on the family farm – is recommended, and at weekends they put on the occasional *lyra* concert. *Faros* (Ⓣ28430 25612; ②–③), almost opposite, has similar facilities, though the apartments, with kitchen, are slightly cheaper. *Asteras* (Ⓣ28430 26787; ③), also inland with fine views from above the road, offers air-conditioned studios with cooking facilities. Down by the beach, *Apartments Ziros* (no phone; ④) is a new two-storey pink edifice that rather blights the landscape, but the views from inside the comfortable, two-room, air-conditioned apartments are great. Right next door the *Akrogiali* **taverna** serves good fish on a seafront terrace and *Kreta Sun*, back by the road, also serves good food, as well as having studio apartments (☎28430 26735; ③).

Despite the stirrings of development, the **main beach** is more than long enough to find seclusion if you want it, and if that isn't escapist enough there are wonderful isolated coves to the north and especially the south where you might never see another soul. The crystal-clear waters here are great for **snorkelling** too – the minimarkets sell the basic equipment. Away from the sea you could stretch your legs with a walk to the tiny chapel on a low hill to the south of the beach. Surrounding this are the ruins of an extensive **Minoan settlement** not yet fully explored or documented. Archeologists argue as to whether Xerókambos is the site of ancient Ambelos (in spite of a location of this name nearby), but artefacts discovered both here and at a looted peak sanctuary in the hills certainly suggest this was a settlement of some significance in ancient times, possibly connected with Zákros palace to the north.

For a more ambitious **walk** you could follow a track that heads south behind the beach for 4km to the deserted village of **Ayía Iríni**, with plenty of opportunities for a dip along the way. Continuing inland from here along the same track would enable you to climb to the peak of **Agridomouri** (627m), descending to **Kaló Horió**, on the paved road to Zíros, on the other side (6km from Ayía Iríni).

Zíros, Handhrás, Etiá and Présos

A good paved road switchbacks up into the mountains behind Xerókambos, heading on via Zíros to meet the main road across the island from Sitía to Ierápetra. Fires have swept across Mount Agridomouri in recent years (probably caused by carelessly discarded cigarettes), rendering an already barren landscape still less inviting: the deep violet *thimári* (wild thyme) and other shrubs that grow among the rocks are amazingly hardy, though, and still show through in spring among the blackened slopes. This road is also populated by herds of goats who – despite the arrival of the asphalt – still regard it as their domain.

Beyond the primitive hamlet of **Hamétoulo** – a piece of living Cretan folklore with twenty dwellings, a cobbled street and a church – all views are dominated by a giant radar dome on the mountain top, and the road itself is dotted with "No Photography" signs, alerting you that this is a military zone and the site of NATO's main command post for the eastern Mediterranean.

At the top of the climb the road levels to a plateau surrounded by rock cliffs, in the midst of which lies the fair-sized farming village of **Zíros**. Tumbling down a hillside towards a busy centre, it's a welcoming place, with a neat *platía* circled by willow and acacia trees with whitewashed trunks. There's even an occasional bus to Sitía. *Taverna Harkiolakis* (☎28430 91266; ②), on the main road through town, makes an inviting stop **to eat** (the roast lamb and goat dishes are recommended) and has a few en-suite **rooms** should you be tempted to stay. They may also have copies of an excellent small book on the history of this area and its villages – *Ziros and Xerokampos*, by the eminent archeologist, the late Níkos Papadákis. It's produced by the local council and, amazingly, it's free. Should you come in late July, you may be lucky enough to catch the annual **festival**, when the women of the village produce huge trays of delicacies, which are laid out on tables in the square and washed down with gallons of *raki* to the accompaniment of *bouzoúki* and *lyra*. For quieter times, there are sixteenth-century frescoes to be seen in the church of **Ayía Paraskeví**, but you may prefer to soak up the atmosphere with a drink at a table in the square. In the early evening, when the rocky heights seem to crowd in on all sides, places like Zíros feel like the real heart of Crete.

Beyond Zíros it's a beautful drive through olive groves and vineyards said to be among the best on the island; the villages are still prosperous, though you feel that their best days are several hundred years behind them. **Handhrás**, another tidy farming village, is entered past its sail-less and derelict irrigation windmills. Somewhat eerily, these have now been replaced by a surreal addition to the landscape – a phalanx of mammoth wind turbines spaced out along the ridge above the village. Again, there's a welcoming **taverna** here, the *Lemon Tree*.

Beyond Handhrás you have a choice of two routes on towards the main road, both very picturesque. The southern, shorter route leads after 4km to **Etiá**, a hamlet where a ruined **Venetian mansion** stands in memorial to the glory days of the Italian city's power in Crete. Built by the Di Mezzo family (whose arms decorate the doorway) in the late fifteenth century, this once elegant edifice was badly damaged in 1828 when the local populace vented their rage on the Turks who had been using it as an administrative base. The bare but impressive restored remains are usually open to explore, one of the very few Venetian buildings to survive outside the cities. Near the grand house is the church of **Ayía Katerína**, with an elegant carved stone tower, and the ruined remains of the village of Etía, little more than one-room stone shacks.

On the more northerly route, via Néa Présos, a lane just outside Handhrás is signed on the right for **Voilá**, a ruined medieval village that you can just see at the foot of the hill. With its Gothic arches and silent paved streets, this is a distinctly eerie place to wander round; two ornamental drinking **fountains** still function, one at each end of the village, with beautiful brass taps – a Turkish contribution to this Venetian stronghold. The twin-naved **Áyios Yeóryios** church (usually locked) has an interesting sixteenth-century gravestone fresco in an interior recess; this and a tower of the Turkish period dominate the site. You can also climb to a ruined Venetian fort above the village.

△ Etiá village

The wind turbines of eastern Crete

The **wind turbines** that stretch across the hills and ridges of many areas of eastern Crete – visible here above Handhrás – have helped turn the island into a world leader in renewable energy. They are a response to the acute electricity shortages the island experiences when its population doubles in the height of summer. For half the year, power demand is less than 250 megawatts, but in high summer this often leaps dramatically to 600 megawatts at peak demand. Wind power can now supply in the region of 150 megawatts. Ironically the very success of the programme may be damaging it, as there is now overcapacity for most of the year, meaning that a significant proportion of the power generated is not used, which has a financial impact on the (mostly private) windfarm operators. The concentration of wind power in the east also means that generation is very dependent on local wind conditions. With the upgrading of the conventional power stations at Iráklion and Haniá, plus a new one already partly on-line at Atherinolakós, a remote site in the far southeast, power shortages are not expected in the foreseeable future, so further development of wind power seems unlikely.

Ancient Présos

The archeological site of **Présos** lies close to the modern village of **Néa Présos**. This is another of those sites where what you see – in this case very little – cannot begin to match the interest and importance of the history. But even without ruins, it would be worth taking the walk around the site for the **scenery** alone. From the centre of the village, opposite a *kafenío* with a raised terrace, a dirt road is clearly signposted downhill. After about 1.5km you'll come to a signed gate for the "First Acropolis" – this is where to leave your vehicle if you have one.

Présos first came to light in 1884, when the Italian archeologist Federico Halbherr turned up a large number of clay idols and some unusual inscriptions written in an unknown tongue – very likely the same as that of the Linear A tablets – using Greek characters. Set out with lines reading alternatively right to left and left to right, these **Eteocretan** (true Cretan) inscriptions are now believed to be evidence of the post–Bronze Age Minoans who fled from the Dorian invasions to remote locations in the east of the island in an attempt to preserve their civilization. Présos seems to have been one of their principal towns, controlling the sanctuary of Dhiktean Zeus at Palékastro, probably an earlier Minoan shrine. With harbours on the north and south coasts of the island, its power eventually led to conflict with the leading Dorian city of the region, Ierápytna (modern Ierápetra). Following final victory about 155 BC, Ierápytna razed Présos to the ground and the city was never rebuilt. With this defeat, the long twilight of Minoan civilization, lasting more than a thousand years after the palaces had fallen, came to an end.

From the entrance, follow the path west to a saddle between the two hills where the ancient city lay. On the summit of the **First Acropolis** (signed to the right) you can make out the foundations of a temple. Further on, the path forks and to the right – on the western slope of the same hill – are the remains of a substantial **Hellenistic house**. Dating from the third century BC, the outer walls of superbly cut stone define the main living rooms at the front of the house, with workrooms at the rear. In the largest workroom, an olive press was found together with a stone tank for storing the oil. A stairway to the left of the main door led down to a cellar.

Turning left at the fork brings you – after a hundred-metre walk across the saddle – to the **Second Acropolis**, where cuttings in the rock on the south side formed the foundations of dwellings; the defensive wall that encircled these two hills can still be made out in places.

Sitía to Ierápetra

The main road across the island from Sitía to the south coast cuts between the east and west ranges of the **Sitía mountains**, giving some fine views in the hill country of the central section before descending towards the sea plain. A number of sturdy hamlets along the route, such as Áyios Yeóryios and Lithínes, make good places to stop for a snack and a beer.

South from Sitía to the coast

Just before Piskokéfalo, less than 2km out of Sitía, Minoan enthusiasts may want to pause at the remains of a **Minoan villa** (signed) cut through by the road. Dating from the late Neo-Palatial period (1550–1450 BC), it had two floors and is terraced into the hillside with the well-preserved staircase giving access to an upper floor. The villa's view would have encompassed the river valley below the road, where its farmlands were probably located.

At the entrance to Piskokéfalo itself, a dirt road is signed to the left for the village of **Zoú**, 6km further on, where there's another **Minoan villa** of the same period. Follow the road, which crosses a dry riverbed and then turns right (signed), eventually becoming asphalt as it winds up into the hills towards Zoú. The villa – not easily spotted and with no sign – lies on a high bank to the right of the road just before the village. Excavated by Nikólaos Pláton, the archeologist who unearthed the palace at Zákros, this is more a farmhouse – cultivating the land in the valley to the east – than simply a country dwelling. The rooms seem to be divided between those for domestic life and others for work and storage of farm equipment. A pottery kiln (perhaps used for making olive-oil containers) was discovered in one room, while two deep pits near the entrance probably stored grain. If you're looking for refreshment, Piskokéfalo has an excellent **taverna** on its main square, the aptly titled *I Plateía*, whose specialities include *kolokithóanthi* (stuffed courgette flowers).

Back on the main Sitía–Ierápetra road, it's a long climb to the island's spine, past Epáno Episkopí and the turning to Présos (see p.217), before the road dips towards **Lithínes**. Just after this, the islands of Koufonísi, to the east, and Gaidhouronísi, to the west, become visible beyond the coastal plain out in the Libyan Sea. You emerge, eventually, on the south coast at **Pilalímata**. Turn left here for Moní Kápsa, Goúdhouras and some small cove beaches (see p.220), or carry on through more or less continuous development into Análipsi and Makriyialós.

Makriyialós and around

At first sight, **Makriyialós** seems just another example of ruinous strip development, and even on better acquaintance it's never wildly attractive. However, it does have its compensations: the development is almost exclusively along the road, so get away from that and there are some quiet corners and pleasant places to stay; there's an attractive little harbour, near which are both a Roman and a Minoan villa; and right in town is one of the best **beaches** at this end of Crete, with sand that shelves so gently you think you could walk the 320km to Africa. There are plenty of other beaches nearby, too, and attractive walks into the hills behind.

Much the most attractive part of town is in the west, where the **harbour** shelters under a little bluff, just off the main road. From there boats run trips to **Koufonísi** (daily, depart 10.30am, return 5.30pm; €15; ☎6977007236), an island to the southeast with extensive Byzantine and Roman remains, including a large Roman theatre, as well as fine beaches. The ruins represent a wealthy history based on trade in porphyry shell, a type of sea-snail from which valuable purple dye was extracted; for now they're free to explore though they may be fenced off in future, or indeed the entire island may be placed off-limits.

Above the harbour, you'll see signs to the **Minoan villa**, 200m inland from the road. Here an important villa of the late Neo-Palatial period (1550–1450 BC) was discovered in 1971 by Costis Davaras. As can be seen from the remains, it had strong outer walls and some fine stone-flagged floors. The ground plan is not unlike that of the palaces, with rooms situated around a **central court**, where an **altar** was also identified. The excavation also revealed that the house was destroyed by fire – yet more evidence for the endless debate over what caused the downfall of the Minoans.

Also above the harbour but on the seaward side are the impressive remains of an extensive **Roman villa**. As you stroll around the neglected site enjoying the sea views you can make out the remains of mosaic floors and – at the southern end – an elaborate suite of bathing rooms complete with **hypocaust** and furnace to provide underfloor heating. In other rooms, traces of plasterwork are visible on the walls along with fragments of the original marble that would have covered them. On the villa's west side, an **atrium** or ornamental garden underlines the fact that this must have been the residence of an important personage.

Continuing west, there's a smaller, emptier beach as you leave Makriyialós, a brief run along an exposed and rocky coast, and then the village of **Koutsourás**, still effectively part of the same resort (albeit the poor relation), with some rather basic rooms and some excellent places to eat.

Accommodation and food

Thanks to its popularity with the package holiday market (generally the more exclusive end of it), Makriyialós is not somewhere you're likely to find a very cheap **room**. There are some very pleasant upmarket choices, though. A couple of the best are up a track inland at the eastern end of the village (strictly speaking, in Análipsi) – look for the signs at a curve in the road. Some 500m up this track, *White River Cottages* (ⓣ28430 51120, ⓔwriver@otenet.gr; ⑥) is an abandoned hamlet of traditional stone dwellings that have been restored as a leafy warren of charming studios and apartments (for up to four people) around a lovely small pool. Built partly into the rocks, with the original stone floors and whitewashed walls, they're well equipped with kitchens, air conditioning and private terraces. A more back-to-nature version of the same thing is available slightly further up the valley at *Aspros Potamos Traditional Houses* (ⓣ28430 51694, ⓦwww.asprospotamos.com; ③). Here another group of tiny stone houses cut from the rock has been delightfully restored as studios and apartments, but in this case the only power is to a solar-powered fridge and single bathroom light (plus hot water from a gas heater) – otherwise you are reliant on oil lamps and candles for lighting, and a fireplace to warm you in winter. Back on the main road by the bottom of the track, *Villea Village* (ⓣ28430 52231, ⓦwww.villeavillage.com; ⑤) has studio rooms in a garden setting with a full-sized pool. Cheaper but uninviting rooms line the seafront towards the middle of the town, or there are some more attractive options near the harbour; *Rooms Romantika* (ⓣ28430 51351; ③) has en-suite rooms looking out over the sea from above the harbour (follow the signs to the Roman Villa). On the harbour itself, the *White House* is one of several classy houses and apartments booked through ⓦwww.makrigialos.com (ⓣ28430 29183; weekly lets only, from about €600 per person in high season). Cheaper rooms places can be found in Koutsourás, including *Pension Marika* (ⓣ28430 51214; ②), with en-suite sea-front rooms and some sea-front apartments nearby (③) – or ask in the tavernas listed below.

The majority of **tavernas** in Makriyialós itself offer fairly standard touristy fare. Among the better choices are *Faros* and *To Limani*, with great positions overlooking the harbour, *To Xani*, towards the east end of town along the main road, and *Oasis*, at the west end. Options improve if you're prepared to travel a bit further: *Taverna Diaskari*, at Dhiaskári beach (see below), is wonderfully sited on the sand, while towards the western end of Koutsourás 🏃 *Taverna Kalliotzina* is old-fashioned and simple, but popular with locals for its traditional, home-cooked food served on a tree-shaded terrace facing the sea. There's no written menu, so check out what's on offer in the kitchen or listen carefully as the day's dishes are reeled off at speed. A short way east along the sea-front *Taverna Votsalakia* is more formal (they do have menus), and serves excellent fish. Still further, 🏃 *Taverna Pipperia* under a spreading pepper tree in the village of Pefkí, in the hills above town, is a lovely spot with authentic, traditional food and great views over the coast.

East of Makriyialós; beaches and Moní Kápsa

Some of the best alternative beaches, especially if you want to escape the crowds, are to the east of Análipsi. The first of them, **Dhiaskári**, is right at the eastern edge of town just beyond the *Sunwing Hotel*, and an easy walk. The taverna here rents out little shelters with hammocks for a truly sybaritic experience, or walk further along the sand to escape people altogether. Further east, there are numerous attractive little coves along the road to Moní Kápsa; to find them, simply look out for where the locals have parked alongside the road. A couple of the better ones are at **Kaló Neró**, where there a two small cafés, not far beyond the large *Dragon's Cave Taverna*, whose signs you can't miss (its hillside terrace has extensive views).

Moní Kápsa (daily 6.30am–12.30pm & 3.30–7pm) enjoys an abiding reputation for miracles as well as a spectacular setting on a ledge in the cliffs where a gorge emerges into the sea. You can still imagine the isolation of this place when no real coast road existed, and even the paved road and extensive restoration can't entirely destroy the romance. The original monastery, probably founded in the early Venetian period, was destroyed by **Turkish pirates** in 1471. It was rebuilt, but most of the present buildings were constructed in the nineteenth century, thanks to the energies of **Yerontoyiannis**, a monk who earned himself a name as a Robin Hood-style hero as well as a healer. Locally he is revered as a saint, and although he never conducted a single service due to his illiteracy and is denied canonization by the Church, Cretans flock to leave offerings beside his silver-encased cadaver and skull in the monastery chapel. You can also visit a **cave** behind the church to which he often retreated and from where there's a fine view towards the island of Koufonísi. See opposite for details of the gorge walk.

Beyond the monastery the coast becomes much less attractive, and **Goúdhouras**, the end of the road for now, particularly so. Numerous grandiose modern villas in finest mock-Classic style attest to a recent local economic boom, thanks in part to the dusty plastic greenhouses scattered along the coast, in part to the small fishing fleet, but above all to the ongoing construction of a new oil- and gas-fired power station (partly operative, but still being expanded) in an isolated spot 5km further round the coast, at Atherinolakós.

Walks around Makriyialós

There are three **gorges** that offer spectacular walks near Makriyialós: the easy way to do each would be to take a taxi to the top (there's no public transport), though it's perfectly possible to go up and down any of them in a day.

Easiest, and closest at hand, is the hike up the **Pefkí Gorge** to the village of Pefkí. This starts up the valley of the Áspro Potámos (White River), on the track past *White River Cottages* (see "Accommodation and food"). A relatively easy walk, though rocky in places, will see you at the top in around two hours. A lovely village, where a number of houses have been bought and done up by foreigners, rewards your efforts, with a couple of relaxing places to sit and eat or drink to take in the views (including the excellent *Taverna Piperia*; see opposite). Right at the top of the village, a lovely little folklore museum is housed in the old school-house, full of traditional artefacts including a working loom.

To the east, the **Pervolákia Gorge** emerges at the sea by the Moní Kápsa where there's a tiny pebble beach offering a chance to cool off. This is the deepest and most spectacular of the gorges, and a slightly more challenging hike; two hours up to the village of Káto Pervolákia, a little less back down. Since there's no transport at either end, you'll need to walk both ways or arrange a pick-up time with a taxi.

West of Koutsourás, keep an eye out on the right for the poorly signed **Koutsourás Communal Park**. This is at the bottom of **Butterfly Gorge**, and the start of a three- to four-hour walk up to the village of Orinó. Despite the name, butterflies have not been much in evidence in recent years, perhaps because the slopes higher up were devastated by a massive fire in 1993, from which they have still not recovered. Some believe that the fire was not the accident it appeared (see box below); many of the nearby villagers would prefer to see olives planted here, or some other "sensible" use of the land.

It's easy enough to stroll a short way into the park (which, since it's on the main Ierápetra road, can be reached by bus) but, despite fire damage, the finest scenery, flora and fauna are to be found further up. In effect there are two gorges here: set out from the park through the first one, then across flatter, cultivated land to a final steep climb. In this final section there are waterfalls (in spring these can become torrents that make the way impassable, so check before setting out) and spectacular mountain scenery. **Orinó** itself is 2km further up the road from the top of the gorge – you can also drive up there, on a road west of the park. Surrounded by lush greenery and wild flowers and at a height of nearly 1000m, the village is noticeably cooler than the coast. There's an excellent *kafenío* as well as a couple of rustic bars where you can slake your thirst after the climb.

The fires of Crete

Forest fires are an all-too-common occurrence in Crete. Understandable, perhaps, given the summer heat and tinderbox conditions but, depressingly, not all are the accidents they seem to be. Figures from the Greek Agricultural Ministry attribute no less than 57 percent of all fires to unknown causes or arson. A survey of fires throughout Greece by the *I Koinonía* newspaper showed a dramatic increase in their number and highlighted further sharp escalations prior to general elections. This, of course, is when the politicians – in a desperate scramble for votes – are willing to recognize the claims to land of those who may have started the fires in the first place. Under Greek law, there is no organized system of land registry for publicly owned land, which means that if an area of woodland is burned down, the barren territory left behind becomes a no-man's-land which can be claimed under squatters' rights. Once olives or other crops have been planted, a foothold towards possession has been attained, with local politicians often smoothing over the obstacles to the ownership of the land being transferred. This callous attitude to the environment, where trees are little regarded for their beauty and their environmental benefits ignored or not understood, has a long history. In his book *Wild Flowers of Crete*, biologist George Sfikas writes that "the Greek holds the deeply rooted view that a green wood is useless because the trees drink valuable water and don't produce anything". Attitudes are slowly changing as environmental awareness grows, especially among the young, but for now fires continue to transform the island from one of the most fertile in the Mediterranean into one of the most barren.

West of Makriyialós: Ayía Fotiá

Through Koutsourás and beyond, the road west towards Ierápetra runs for the most part along an exposed and rocky coast marred by plastic greenhouses. About halfway, though, there's a genuinely mountainous stretch for a few kilometres, with some attractive cove beaches below. One good example is at **Ahliá**, with a taverna and other facilities, but perhaps the finest is at **Ayía Fotiá**, where a poorly signed turning (hazardously situated halfway round a bend) leads down to an excellent small, sandy **beach** hidden from the road in a wooded valley. The tiny resort here is quiet at night, but the beach can get very crowded on summer weekends, when parking is also a nightmare.

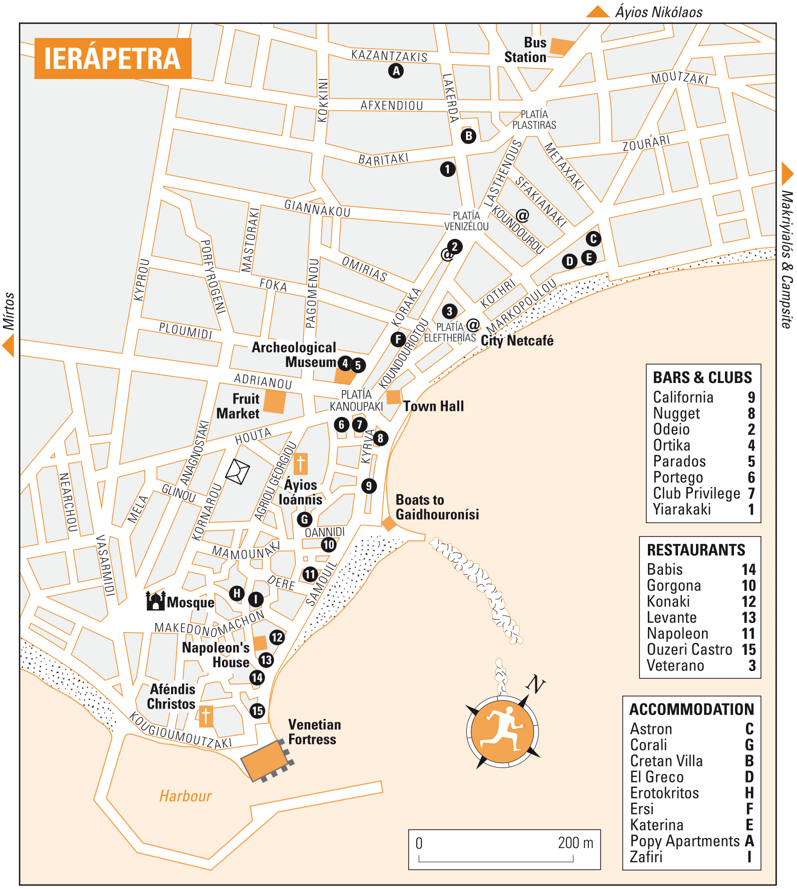
There are several places with **rooms**, ranging from the large and relatively upmarket *Eden Rock Hotel* (☎ 28420 61370, ⓦ www.edenrock.gr; ⑦), on the main road, where air-conditioned rooms come with fridge and satellite TV and there's a large pool, to cheaper options like *Markos Studios* (☎ 28420 61906, ⓦ www.markos-studios.com; ③), down towards the beach, for studios with air conditioning and kitchenette. Right by the beach, *Taverna Agia Fotia* (☎ 28420 61288; ③) has more rooms with similar facilities, and is probably the best of the **places to eat**.

Ayía Fotiá is, sadly, the final place from here until well beyond Ierápetra which could be described as inviting. The final 10km of road runs fast across a flat plain, unimaginatively developed for tourism along the coast and for hothouse agriculture inland. The next village along, **Férma**, has little to offer although it's worth looking out for a sign for "Roman Fish Tanks" on the left in front of the *Kakkos Bay Hotel*, a kilometre or so beyond the village. The remarkable **Roman fish tank** here is some four metres square, carved out of the rock with the sea still sloshing through an ancient sluicegate in the bottom. The carved steps leading down into the tank would have been used by the fish sellers to net the fish demanded by their customers; the pools in the surrounding rocks were no doubt used for the fish to be sold that day, whilst the smaller ones could be fattened up in the larger tank below.

The dull village of **Koutsonári**, 1km further west, is no great shakes either, though as always if you head away from the coast and into the hills you're back in timeless Crete. In this case a scenic 10km drive north leads to the hilltop hamlet of **Áyios Ioánnis**, where there are four churches. *Camping Koutsounari* (☎ 28420 61213) is the only campsite on this stretch of the south coast. It has a taverna and store, and although the campground is a bit gritty there's a good beach and plenty of shade. This is also the beginning of the aptly named **Long Beach**, a windswept line of sand (and the wind can really blow here) which stretches virtually unbroken along the final 5km of shore to Ierápetra.

Ierápetra

IERÁPETRA has various claims to fame – the southernmost town in Europe, the most hours of sunshine, the largest town on the south coast of Crete – but until recently, charm was not one of them. Though there's an excellent blue-flagged beach, it's a big, sprawling place and a major supply centre for the region's numerous and affluent farmers who have grown rich on the year-round cultivation of cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers in the plastic greenhouses that scar the landscape along this coast (see the box on p.227). In recent years some resources have been devoted to smartening the town up, with buildings refurbished and restored, squares and the sea front landscaped. Nonetheless, tourism seems very much an afterthought.


IERÁPETRA
Áyios Nikólaos
Mírtos
Makriyialos & Campsite
Bus Station
KAZANTZAKIS
AFXENDIOU
KOKKINI
LAKERDA
MOUTZAKI
ZOURARI
PLATÍA PLASTIRAS
BARITAKI
LASTHENOUS
METAXAKI
SFAKIANAKI
KOUNDOUROU
GIANNAKOU
PLATÍA VENIZÉLOU
MASTORAKI
PORFYROGENI
KYPROU
OMIRIAS
FOKA
PAGOMENOU
KORAKA
KOTHRI
MARKOPOULOU
PLOUMIDI
PLATÍA ELEFTHERÍAS
City Netcafé
Archeological Museum
KOUNDOURIOTOU
ADRIANOU
Fruit Market
PLATÍA KANOUPAKI
Town Hall
HOUTA
ANAGNOSTAKI
KYRVA
AGRIOU GEORGIOU
Áyios Ioánnis
NEARCHOU
GLINOU
KORNAROU
MELA
Boats to Gaidhouronísi
OANNIDI
MAMOUNAKI
VASARMIDI
DERE
SAMOUIL
Mosque
MAKEDONOMACHON
Napoleon's House
Aféndis Christos
KOUGIOUMOUTZAKI
Venetian Fortress
Harbour
N
0 200 m
BARS & CLUBS
California 9
Nugget 8
Odeio 2
Ortika 4
Parados 5
Portego 6
Club Privilege 7
Yiarakaki 1
RESTAURANTS
Babis 14
Gorgona 10
Konaki 12
Levante 13
Napoleon 11
Ouzeri Castro 15
Veterano 3
ACCOMMODATION
Astron C
Corali G
Cretan Villa B
El Greco D
Erotokritos H
Ersi F
Katerina E
Popy Apartments A
Zafiri I

Some history

Although you'd hardly know it to look at the town today, Ierápetra has quite a history. Early knowledge is sketchy, but it's almost certain that there was a settlement, or at least a port, here in **Minoan** times. A look at the map suggests a link across the isthmus with Gourniá, and it was probably from Ierápetra and other south-coast harbours that the Keftiu, as the Egyptians called the Cretans, sailed for the coast of Africa.

However, it was as a **Doric** settlement that **Ierápytna**, as the place was then known, grew to real prominence. By the second century BC it occupied more territory than any other Cretan city. Ierápytna became a bastion of the Greek Dorians against their bitter enemies the Eteocretans: the final victory over Eteocretan Présos in 155 BC ended the last Minoan presence in eastern Crete. Only Ítanos, near Vái, now stood between Ierápytna and the complete domination of the eastern end of the island. Prolonged wars and disputes rumbled on for almost a century, and were finally brought to an end only by Rome's ruthless conquest of the entire island. Even then, Ierápytna stubbornly resisted to the last, becoming the final city to fall to the invading legions.

When **Rome** then joined Crete to Cyrene in northern Libya, forming the province of Cyrenaica, Ierápytna embarked on a new career as an important **commercial centre**, trading with Greece and Italy as well as Africa and the Near East. During this period, much impressive building took place – theatres, amphitheatres, temples – of which virtually nothing survives today, save for piles of fractured pillars and column capitals scattered in odd corners around the town.

From the Romans to the tourists is a chronicle of steady decline. The Venetians (who favoured Sitía as their administrative centre in the east) left behind a small **fortress**, now restored, defending the harbour entrance. The Turks, under whom Ierápetra languished as a backwater, are represented by a nineteenth-century **mosque** and nearby Ottoman fountain.

Arrival and information

Driving into Ierápetra is something of a nightmare thanks to a complex one-way system, and parking worse. The easiest plan is to follow the signs to the Archeological Collection, and from there to the Seafront and Parking, where you can leave your car for the duration. The **bus station** is on Lasthénous – the Áyios Nikólaos road – around five minutes' walk north of the centre. It's convenient for a couple of the good budget places to stay (see below), but for a better impression of the town you should again head down towards the water, past the souvenir stores and stalls selling foreign newspapers, to the sea front and promenade. Here, with a string of restaurants and bars stretching out in either direction – to the left behind the beach, right towards the fortress and the harbour – Ierápetra can be genuinely picturesque.

The municipality publishes some excellent **maps and leaflets** as well as maintaining an informative website (Ⓦwww.ierapetra.gr), but the printed matter is not always easy to get hold of. Try at the public library (Mon–Fri 9am–2pm), to the side of the Dhimarhío (Town Hall) on the seaward side of Platía Kanoupáki; alternatively local hotels and travel agents often have copies. The **tourist police** (Ⓣ28420 22560) are also located in the Town Hall.

Accommodation

Finding accommodation is not usually a problem in Ierápetra, although narrow streets and motorbikes can make for noisy nights, especially in the old town. The cheaper possibilities are generally near the bus station and in the narrow streets of the old town; hotels fronting the beach to the north and east are more modern and pricey. Most of the big package hotels are strung out along the coast east of town. The nearest **campsite** is *Camping Koutsounari*, 7km east on the Sitía road (see p.222).

Astron Kothrí 56 Ⓣ28420 25114, Ⓔhtastron@otenet.gr. Ierápetra's leading downtown hotel, and like the town a sometimes awkward mix of business and tourism. Comfortable rooms come with balcony views, a/c, minibar, strongbox and satellite TV. Rates include breakfast. ⑦

Corali Ioannídhou 18 Ⓣ28420 27755. Easily spotted behind the tavernas along Samouil, these are slightly tired balcony rooms with bath and a/c (€5 extra) in a restored house in the old quarter. ②

Cretan Villa Lakérda 16 Ⓣ28420 28522, Ⓦwww.cretan-villa.com. Close to the bus station, offering sparkling en-suite rooms with satellite TV, fridge and a/c (extra) in a beautiful 190-year-old house with a delightful patio for taking breakfast. ③

El Greco Kothrí 42 Ⓣ28420 28471, Ⓕ28420 24515. Decent beachfront place with en-suite a/c (€5 supplement) rooms with balcony sea view; rooms facing inland are cheaper, and there are discounts for eating in their restaurant below. ④

Erotokritos Paradós Stratígou Samouíl Ⓣ2842 28151. Decent, en-suite rooms – some with a/c – and apartments with kitchenette, fridges and fans. Tucked away in the old quarter and hard to find. ②

Ersi Platía Eleftherías 19 Ⓣ28420 23208. Refurbished hotel where good-value rooms come with fridge, a/c (€5 extra), bath and balcony – the higher the better for sea views. The owner here also has some apartments nearby, which come with kitchen and lounge, for the same price. ③

Katerina On the sea front close to the *El Greco* Ⓣ28420 28345, Ⓕ28420 28591. Sea-front rooms with balcony, TV, a/c and shared fridge. Big reductions out of season. ④

Popy Apartments Kazantzákis 27 Ⓣ28420 24289, Ⓕ28420 27772. Economical en-suite rooms; there are also two apartments with kitchen, fans and small garden. ②

Zafiri Makedhonómachon, cnr Triándhaphillidou Ⓣ28420 24422, Ⓕ28420 23339. Hard to find in the narrow backstreets and often unattended, so ask at the nearby sea-front *Taverna Konaki* (p.226), run by the same family. Attractive a/c rooms come with balcony, fridge and TV, and guests get discounts at the taverna. ②

The Town and around

Things to do in Ierápetra by day – apart from lie on the beach – are limited. The **Archeological Museum** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €2), housed in the former Turkish school, is the main event. It's poorly labelled and doesn't take long to see, but there are some high-quality exhibits. Highlights are the numerous Minoan **larnakes**, the finest example of which was excavated at nearby Episkopí. Dating from the very end of the Neo-Palatial period (ca.1300 BC), this *lárnax*, or clay coffin, has fascinating painted panels, one of which depicts a mare suckling her foal. Other scenes revel in the stalking of the *kri-kri*, or wild goat, by hunting dogs. Look out too for some interesting **Vasilikí ware** (see p.191), including typical jugs and vases, as well as some potters' turntables from the Early Minoan settlement at Fournoú Korifí (p.228). The Greek and Roman section contains a selection of statuary, mostly headless because iconoclastic Christians tended to regard the stone craniums as places where the spirit of the devil was lurking. One more recent discovery, however, managed to hang on to hers: a wonderful second-century statue of **Persephone**, holding an ear of corn in her left hand. Her head is crowned by a small altar encoiled by two serpents, symbols of her divinity.

The other obvious sight is the restored fortress known as the **Kalés** (daily 8.30am–3pm; free), guarding the harbour. Reputedly built by the Genoese pirate Pescatore in 1212, the present structure is basically a seventeenth-century Venetian defence, later used and modified by the Turks. Atmospheric as it is, it's simply an empty shell, with no signage of any kind or anything else apart from some good public toilets.

Nearby in the old town, you'll see signs through the narrow alleys to **Napoleon's House**. Here the emperor supposedly spent the night of June 6, 1798, when his fleet stopped over in Ierápetra on their way to Egypt. Perhaps more worthwhile are the twin-domed church of **Aféndis Christós**, a fourteenth-century building with a fine carved and painted wooden iconostasis, and the **Tzami**, or **Turkish Mosque**. Painstakingly restored (it had been converted to a church), the mosque retains a substantial chunk of its minaret and – inside – the original mihrab.

Out of town

There are a number of ways to escape the town's often stifling summer temperatures. Simplest is the day-trip by *kaïki* to **Gaidhouronísi** (also known as Chrissi or Donkey Island), some 10km offshore. A real desert island a little over 4km in length, with a fine cedar forest and a couple of tavernas, Gaidhouronísi has some excellent sandy **beaches** and plenty of room to escape – although you wouldn't want to miss the boat back. Should you wish to explore, there's a waymarked **walking route** around the island on which you should spot quite a few examples of the varied flora and fauna, as well as fossils and the fabulous "**Shell Beach**" covered with discarded shells from countless generations of molluscs (no souvenir-taking allowed). Boats (with an on-board bar) leave from the jetty on the sea front at 10.30am and 12.30pm, returning at 4pm and 5pm; the trip each way takes about an hour. Tickets cost €20 (children under 12 half-price) and you can either pay on the boat or get tickets in advance from local travel agencies. Alternatively, there are more **beaches** along the coast a few kilometres in either direction, with good bus services along the main road behind them.

Eating and entertainment

When it comes to **eating** and **drinking**, your only problem here is sifting out the quality from the quantity. Along Markópoulou, the sea-front promenade stretching behind the beach north of the town hall, there's a string of touristy restaurants and fancy café/bars with outdoor seating, many of which serve breakfast. Samouíl, the promenade to the south of the ferry terminal, has a string of considerably more authentic **tavernas** facing the sea. The town's best places are here: *Napoleon*, which is Ierápetra's oldest, is busy with locals enjoying traditional food at lunchtime – ask for a mixed plate of their cheese and vegetable pies. *Konaki* and *Gorgona*, both nearby, also do traditional dishes well, while up towards the fortress are slightly more elegant *Levante* – for seafood especially – and *Babis*, the fanciest of the places along here. *Ouzeri Castro*, the last in line, is a complete contrast, a very basic place whose *mezédhes* are popular with locals. In town, *Veterano* is an elegant bakery/*zaharoplastío* on Platía Eleftherías with a terrace where you can sit and watch the action, and there are plenty of more basic café and fast-food options between Platía Kanoupáki and Platía Eleftherías, as well as south of Platía Kanoupáki along Kírva.

Bars and **discos** are concentrated in much the same areas – along the sea front and in the streets immediately behind, especially Kírva – while bigger clubs can be found in the hotel zone to the east. *California*, at Kírva 23, is typical of the touristy places along here, open from morning till late for breakfast and then drinks and music. *Nugget*, Kírva 7, is a great deal fancier – a stylish café/bar that comes into its own late at night. Numerous nightspots can also be found right by the Archeological Museum: *Parados* is a lovely place with an ambience as laid back as the jazz that is played there, and also sells arty books; *Ortika*, next door, is large and impossibly fashionable. Across Platía Kanoupáki from here on N. Fonadhiákis, *Portego* is another pleasant music bar, directly opposite which is the late-night *Club Privilege*. Further into town are two more traditional places popular with locals, *Odeio*, a pleasant garden café/bar (with food and internet) housed in a former music school at Lasthénous 18, and *Yiarakaki*, at Lakérda 13 near the *Cretan Villa*, a traditional *mezedhopolío* which often has live Greek music in the evenings.

During the Kyrvia festival in July and August the municipality organizes a variety of cultural events in town, including regular free performances of Cretan **lyra** and **dance**, staged at the small open-air theatre to the left of the town hall, starting at around 10pm.

Listings

Banks Among many others, the National Bank on Platía Eleftherías and the Ionian Bank on Platía Venizélou both have ATMs.

Bike and car rental There are dozens of car and bike rental agents: reliable local ones include Motor Club, Lasthénous by the bus station (☎28420 25374), for scooters and motorbikes, and South Crete Tours, Lasthénous 36 (☎28420 22892), for cars.

Books and newspapers Euro 2000, Koundoúriotou 13, just off Platía Eleftherías, sells foreign press and magazines, as does the Somarakis bakery, Platía Kounoupáki, opposite the Archeological Museum.

Bus station For information call ⓣ28420 28237.

Internet Plenty of Internet cafés including the huge (and noisy) *City Netcafé*, near Platía Eleftherías with entrances on Kothrí and Markópoulo, and *Odeio*, Lasthénous 18 near Platía Plastíras.

Post office Kornárou 7.

Shopping There's an entertaining street market on Saturday mornings (until 1pm) along Psilinaki, 100m northeast of the bus station.

Travel agencies Ierápetra Express (ⓣ28420 28673, ⓔexpress@ier.forthnet.gr) on Platía Eleftherías is helpful and a useful source of general information about the town and local festivals and events, as well as accommodation in and around town. There are plenty of others throughout the centre.

West to Mírtos

The 13km of coastline to the west of Ierápetra offers little of interest until beyond the village of Ammoudháres, where a couple of fascinating hilltop **Minoan sites** are worth the climb to reach them. Slightly further west, the pleasant seaside village of **Mírtos** is another welcoming resort. Inland, detours into the hills allow visits to attractive hamlets in the foothills of the Dhiktean mountain range, with plenty of opportunities for trekking. As you leave the city the coast is swathed in plastic (see box below), and with signs of the wealth this form of agriculture has brought to the region: gleaming car and kitchen showrooms line the road.

Detours inland

To escape the trucks and ribbon development of the coast road, there are a couple of **scenic detours** that head off from **Gra Ligiá**, 4km west of Ierápetra. The first winds inland, upwards past the reservoir of **Bramianá**. This artificial lake (the island's largest) is important for local agriculture, but has also become a major stop-over for migratory birds. Large numbers of waterfowl and birds of prey can be seen here, especially in spring when there's also plenty of vivid plant life. Facilities for bird-watchers are being expanded, but already include a car park that gives access to various hides and pathways around the lake. Climbing again – with fine views over the Libyan Sea – you eventually reach the charming hamlet of **Kalamáfka**, tucked into a mountain cleft. The bars along the tiny main street provide a good excuse to stop for a while.

From here, you could reach the north coast and Áyios Nikólaos via the village of **Prína** or, by taking the road to **Anatolí**, pick up the second detour. This also starts from Gra Ligiá, a hundred metres beyond the first, and is signed for Anatolí, eventually climbing to **Máles**, a village clinging to the lower slopes

The plastic revolution

The plastic greenhouses that disfigure much of this stretch of coastline are a great source of wealth for the farmers of Ierápetra and its satellite villages. The system was introduced here in the 1960s by a Dutch farmer named Paul Coopers. He correctly surmised that the mild climate and fertile soil along this coast would perfectly suit greenhouse crops, which could be produced all year and sold to supermarkets in northern Europe in the depths of winter. The plastic tents were initially ridiculed, but once the canny Cretan farmers saw the size and quality of the tomatoes that emerged from them in the middle of January, the revolution began. Coopers died in a road accident in 1968 when the new system had hardly got going. However, in typically Cretan fashion, the farmers did not forget who had brought them this horn of plenty – they erected a statue to Coopers on the site of his first greenhouse.

of the Dhíkti range. Máles would be a good starting point if you wanted to take a **walk** through some stunning mountain terrain (the E4 Pan-European footpath passes just 3km north of here). Otherwise, the road down, signed for Míthi (where there's a great gorge walk; see p.230), has spectacular views over the Libyan Sea and eventually follows the Mírtos river valley down to Mírtos itself.

Néa Mírtos and Pírgos

Continuing west along the coast road from Gra Ligiá, it's 8km further to **Fournoú Korifí** (Kiln Hill, also known as **Néa Mírtos**), where a Minoan site excavated in the 1960s by a British team yielded important evidence concerning early Minoan settlements. The site is located beyond the village on the peak to your right, where a roadside sign (a difficult stopping point when traffic is busy) points up a gully. Scramble up this to the top and keep ahead towards a stand of pine trees. A path just before the trees heads right across a flat expanse of brush towards a hill where the fenced site is clearly visible. The gate is left open.

The excavations – which are not always easy to make sense of – revealed not a villa but a much earlier **stone-built village** of nearly one hundred rooms, spread over the hilltop. Probably typical of numerous other settlements sited on the coast of eastern Crete during the early Pre-Palatial period (ca.2500 BC), these rooms contained stone and copper tools, carved seals and over seven hundred **pottery vessels**. Some of these were Vasilikí-type jugs with their intriguing mottled finish, and many were no doubt used to store the produce of the surrounding lands, then less arid than today – olives, vines and cereals. In a room in the southwest corner of the site was located the oldest known Minoan domestic shrine, which produced the most important of the finds: the **goddess of Mírtos**, a clay idol with a stalked neck carrying a ewer. (It's now in the Áyios Nikólaos museum, along with most of the other finds from this site and Pírgos.) Around the goddess, broken offering vessels were strewn about the floor, many of them charred by the fire that destroyed the site about 2200 BC. The riddle of the fire, which seems to have left no casualties and provoked no rebuilding, is yet another of the unresolved Minoan questions.

Pírgos

Pírgos, a bare kilometre further west, is considerably easier to get to and has a superb view over the coast. The sign to this Minoan villa comes immediately before a large bridge across the Mírtos river. Turn in here and follow a signed and waymarked footpath to the right, which climbs to the site, atop the low hill.

The settlement here was inhabited at much the same time as Fournoú Korifí and was also destroyed by fire around 2200 BC. Unlike Fournoú Korifí, however, Pírgos was reoccupied and rebuilt following its destruction, when it appears to have incorporated the former's lands. By the time of the Neo-Palatial period (ca.1600 BC), the community occupying the lower slopes was dominated by a two- or three-storey country villa spread over the crown of the hill.

The path up circles around the back of the hill and past the remains of an enormous plastered **cistern**, the largest found in Minoan Crete, dating from the Pre-Palatial era (ca.1900–1700 BC). When it burst over the northern side of the hill in ancient times, it was not repaired. Beyond this, a fine stretch of **paved road** survives from the early period: this led to a burial pit, now excavated. Continuing up, a **stepped street** flanked by some well-cut lower courses of the villa's outer wall leads into a **courtyard**, partly paved in the purple limestone of the region. At the rear of the villa (furthest away from the sea) on the west side, it's possible to make out a **light well** floored with the same purple limestone. Many of the walls carry marks of the ferocious blaze that destroyed the villa around 1450 BC, lending credibility to the Thíra explosion theory, especially since volcanic material was discovered amidst the rubble. But it now seems that whilst the villa was burned, the surrounding settlement was untouched – another puzzle to contemplate as you savour the magnificent sea view from the courtyard.

Mírtos

MÍRTOS, 15km west of Ierápetra, lies just off the main road, which here turns inland, heading up towards Áno Viánnos. Razed to the ground by the German army in 1943 as a punishment for resistance activities, Mírtos today is an unexpected pleasure after the drabness of what has gone before. This charming white-walled village is kept clean as a whistle by its house-proud inhabitants, and most of the summer you'll find plenty of space on the long shingle beach. Even in August, when the place can get pretty full, the pace of life remains slow, the atmosphere pleasantly laid-back.

Apart from topping up your tan, swimming, renting a boat or lingering over a drink, there's not a great deal to do here, though you could while away half an hour or so in the village **museum** (Mon–Fri 9am–1pm; €1.50), located to the side of the church. Inside are minor finds from the Minoan settlements at Fournoú Korifí and Pírgos (see p.228) as well as a folklore section with tools, kitchen and farming implements once used by the villagers. There's also a superb detailed clay model of the site at Fournoú Korifí. The collection was put together by a much-loved and respected local schoolmaster, Yiórgos Dimitrianákis, who taught most of the adults in the village prior to his death in 1994. Throughout his life, he spent much of his free time wandering the fields and hills around Mírtos collecting a wealth of finds, including ancient statuettes and vase fragments, and it was he who brought the Fournoú Korifí and Pírgos sites to the attention of archeologists.

More **ancient ruins** can be seen at the eastern end of the sea front to the side of the *Big Blue* hotel. A huge, brick-built circular tank construction may be part of a Roman baths complex, and beyond this are walls and, closer to the beach, harbour installations – all awaiting archeological investigation.

Practicalities

Most of the time there are plenty of **rooms** advertised throughout Mírtos – on every street it seems. Many of the places below, and more, are represented on the websites listed under travel agencies. On the main thoroughfare behind the beach the friendly little *Hotel Mirtos* (ⓣ28420 51227, ⓦwww.myrtoshotel.com; ③) is good value: rooms come with air conditioning, room safe, TV and balcony, with better views on the second floor. Nearby, *Rooms Angelos* (ⓣ28420 51203; ③) offers balcony studios and apartments with kitchenette. Over towards the church, the *Cretan House* (ⓣ28420 51427, ⓔpgd@hol.gr; ②) flatters to deceive – the elegant exterior hides very plain rooms with fridge and use of a shared kitchen. On the west side of the village near the beach, *Big Blue Apartments* (ⓣ28420 51094, ⓦwww.big-blue.gr; ③–⑥) has comfortable air-conditioned rooms, studios with kitchenette and larger two-room apartments, all with sea-view balconies. Higher still, on the hill behind *Big Blue* and all with balconies giving great views, are *Villa Mare* (ⓣ28420 51274; ②), with simple en-suite rooms, some with cooking facilities; 🏃 *Villa Elena* (ⓣ28420 51396; ③), for well-equipped studios with kitchen but no air conditioning, and slightly pricier, more luxurious air-conditioned studios at *Panorama* (ⓣ28420 51362; ③), next door. More economical options are provided by *Nikos House* in the centre (ⓣ28420 51116, ⓦwww.nikoshouse.cz, in Czech only; ②), where plain studios or two-room apartments come with fans, bath and kitchenette, and *Rooms Despina* (Ⓣ28420 51524; ②), with good-value en-suite rooms on the main street heading inland, not far from Magic Tours. On the edge of the village in this direction, *Kastro Apartments* (Ⓣ28420 51444, Ⓦwww.kastro-myrtos.gr; ⑤) has studios and apartments arranged around a pleasant garden with pool; a nice place, though right by the road.

There are several travel agencies in Mírtos offering local **information** as well as help with rooms, villas for rent, money exchange, car rental etc. Perhaps the most helpful is Prima Tours (Ⓣ28420 51035, Ⓦwww.sunbudget.net), near the beach towards the eastern end of the village, where the bus timetable and lots of other information is posted up; in addition there's **Internet** access (also at *Cafe Edem*; see below), a book exchange service, and details of mountain-bike hire. Others include Magic Tours (Ⓣ28420 51203, Ⓦwww.magictours.gr), on the main street by *Rooms Angelos*, and Ⓦwww.go2kreta.com (Ⓣ28420 89956, website in German only), also on the main street near the *Hotel Mirtos*. Check out, too, the website Ⓦwww.myrtos.org, not so much for its practical information, which is limited, as for some superb stories about the village and local characters.

Along the main street are several minimarkets and bakeries providing all the essentials, as well as phone boxes and newspaper kiosks. The **bus station** – actually a couple of rickety stands on the main road at the rear of the village – has six daily services to and from Ierápetra (less at weekends) and a couple of departures for Iráklion. Sailing **boats**, zodiacs, kayaks and canoes can be rented from Scirocco, based on the beach, who also do sailing courses (Ⓣ28420 51232, Ⓔsciroccomirtos@web.de).

For **eating** and **drinking**, there's a line of cafés, bars and restaurants along the sea-front promenade behind the beach: *Karavostasis* at the western end and the more central *Votsalo* are recommended, while *Akti*, at the opposite end, does some vegetarian dishes. In the heart of the village, the taverna of the *Hotel Mirtos* is also very good. *Katerina's*, around the corner, is the oldest-established place and has a loyal band of customers. *Café Edem* on the street between the *Hotel Mirtos* and *Katerina's* is a pleasant *zaharoplastío* coffeehouse and a good place for **breakfast**. Once the sun goes down, there's little to do but prolong your eating and drinking into the night, although the odd bar sometimes risks breaking the late-night curfew with a blast of soft rock, and in summer there's the occasional *lyra* and *bouzoúki* concert on the beach.

Walks around Mírtos

There are more good **beaches**, some in walking distance, along the road that follows the coast 6km west to **Tértsa**, and then on to Árvi (see p.161). A more adventurous hike is along the scenic 150-metre-deep **Sarakinás gorge** close to the village of Míthi, some 5km north of Mírtos. To reach the start of the walk, use your own transport (or take a taxi) to Míthi and then follow the signs to the gorge. Five minutes downhill is a small parking place, just before the bridge, where the gorge walk begins. Depending on the rains, the water level in the gorge may mean you'll have to do some wading in parts, so waterproof footwear, sandals or rubber shoes would be useful to bring along. It's about 2km or one hour's climb to the top of the gorge and a little less coming back down, by which time the *kafenío* in Míthi will be an irresistible stop for a drink or snack. Should you not wish to repeat the scramble back down, it's possible to pick up an asphalt road back to Míthi by following the river a further 300m upstream from the top of the gorge to where it's feasible to wade across. A path heads off right from the opposite bank to meet the road.

Greek place names

ΑΓΙΟΣ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ	Αγιος Νικόλαος	Áyios Nikólaos
ΑΓΙΑ ΦΩΤΙΑ	Αγία Φωτιά	Ayía Fotiá
ΒΑΙ	Βάι	Vái
ΓΟΥΡΝΙΑ	Γούρνιά	Gourniá
ΕΛΟΥΝΤΑ	Ελούντα	Eloúnda
ΖΑΚΡΟΣ	Ζάκρος	Zákros
ΙΕΡΑΠΕΤΡΑ	Ιεράπετρα	Ierápetra
ΚΡΙΤΣΑ	Κριτσά	Kritsá
ΛΑΣΙΘΙΟΥ	Λασίθιου	Lasíthi
ΜΑΚΡΥΓΙΑΛΟΣ	Μακρυγιαλός	Makriyialós
ΜΙΡΤΟΣ	Μίρτος	Mírtos
ΜΟΧΛΟΣ	Μόχλος	Móhlos
ΝΕΑΠΟΛΗ	Νεάπολη	Neápoli
ΠΑΛΑΙΚΑΣΤΡΟ	Παλαίκαστρο	Palékastro
ΣΗΤΕΙΑ	Σητεία	Sitía
ΣΠΗΝΑΛΟΓΚΑ	Σπηναλόγκα	Spinalónga
ΤΖΕΡΜΙΑΔΟ	Τζερμιάδο	Tzermiádho
ΨΥΧΡΟ	Ψυχρό	Psihró

Travel details

Buses

Some of these services vary seasonally, and many are restricted at weekends, especially on Sundays. You can pick up timetables at most bus stations. Information at Ⓦwww.bus-service-crete-ktel.com or Ⓦwww.ktel-heraklio-lassithi.gr, though timetables are not always up to date.

Áyios Nikólaos to: Eloúnda (20 daily; 6am–7pm; 20min); Ierápetra (9 daily; 6.30am–9pm; 1hr); Iráklion (at least 20 daily; 6.15am–9.30pm; 1hr 30min); Kritsá (10 daily; 7am–8pm; 20min); Sitía (7 daily; 6.15am–8.30pm; 1hr 45min).

Ierápetra to: Ay. Nikólaos (9 daily; 6.30am–9pm; 1hr); Iráklion (9 daily; 6.30am–9pm; 2hr 30min); Makriyialós (8 daily; 6.15am–8pm; 30min); Mírtos (6 daily; 6.30am–8pm; 30min); Sitía (7 daily; 6.15am–8pm; 1hr 30min).

Sitía to: Ay. Nikólaos (7 daily; 5.30am–8pm; 1hr 45min); Ierápetra (6 daily; 6.15am–8pm; 1hr 30min); Iráklion (7 daily; 5.30am–8pm; 3hr 15min); Káto Zákros (2 daily, 11am & 2pm; 1hr 20min); Makriyialós (6 daily; 6.15am–8pm; 1hr); Palékastro (7 daily; 6am–6pm; 45min); Vái (4 daily; 9.30am–4pm; 1hr).

Ferries

The only scheduled ferries currently operating from Lasíthi are with LANE lines (Ⓦwww.lane.gr), whose ferries regularly shuttle between the Dodecanese and Pireás, via Sitía and Áyios Nikólaos. There are occasional trips by fast catamaran or hydrofoil from Áyios Nikólaos to Santorini (Thíra) during the summer. LANE departures are currently:

From Áyios Nikólaos Tuesday 10am to Sitía (1hr 30 min), Kássos (4hr), Kárpathos (6hr), Hálki (9hr 30min) and Ródhos (11hr).

Thursday and Sunday 5.15pm to Santorini (4hr 30min), Mílos (8hr) and Pireás (13hr 30min).

From Sitía Tuesday 11.30am, Wednesday 5.30pm and Saturday 12.40pm to Kássos (2hr 30min), Kárpathos (4hr 30min), Hálki (8hr) and Ródhos (9hr 30min).

Thursday and Sunday 3.20pm to Áyios Nikólaos (1hr 30min), Santorini (6hr 30min), Mílos (10hr) and Pireás (15hr 30min).

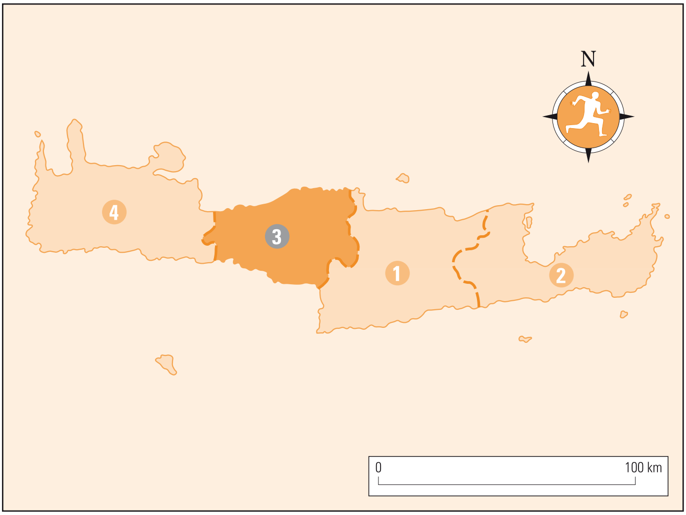
Flights

Currently the only scheduled flights are domestic connections with Olympic (Ⓦwww.olympicairlines.com). Some international charters also fly to Sitía.

Sitía to: Alexandhroúpoli (Tues, Fri & Sun); Athens (Tues, Fri & Sun); Thessaloníki (one stop, Tues & Sun) and Préveza (Tues, Fri & Sun).

3

Réthimnon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CHAPTER 3

Highlights

- ✱ **Réthimnon** The provincial capital has ornate Venetian and Turkish monuments and an atmospheric old quarter, as well as good museums, restaurants and nightlife. **See p.237**
- ✱ **Moní Arkádhi & Moní Préveli** Two of Crete's most important monasteries, the imposing Moní Arkádhi and the seaside Moní Préveli are both inextricably bound up with the island's history. **See p.248 & p.287**
- ✱ **Margarítes** A major centre of ceramics production, this village is the place to buy anything from an egg-cup to a massive Minoan-style *píthos*. **See p.258**
- ✱ **Anóyia** A gateway to Mount Psiloritís, this charming village is famous for its woven rugs and tapestries. **See p.262**
- ✱ **Mount Psiloritís** Dominating the province, Crete's highest peak provides some spectacular walks to the summit chapel of the Holy Cross. **See p.264**
- ✱ **Amári valley** A delightfully scenic stretch of country, where white-walled villages with frescoed Byzantine chapels are surrounded by orchards, vineyards and olive groves. **See p.272**
- ✱ **Plakiás and Ayía Galíni** The province's twin but contrasting south coast resorts: Plakiás has an easy-going air, while its more picturesque sister is brasher and bursting with life. **See p.282 & p.278**

△ Mountain road

3

Réthimnon

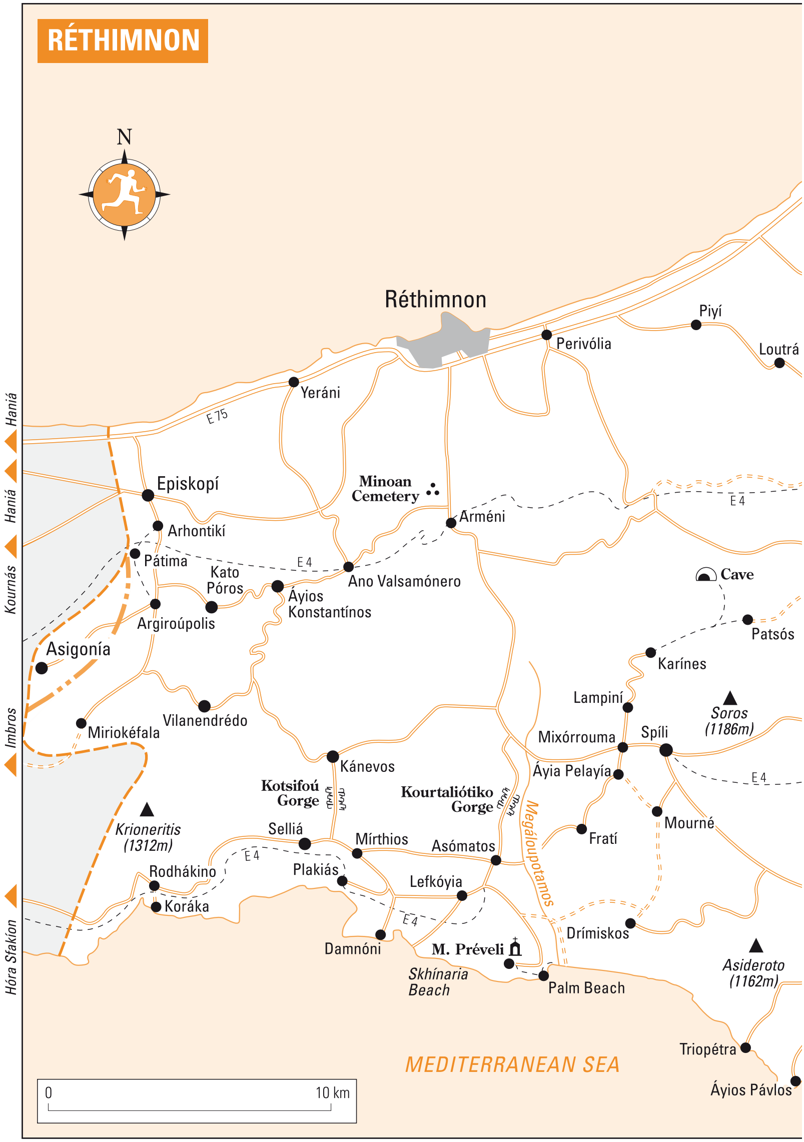
On the north coast, the provincial capital of **Réthimnon** is a relaxed university town with a reputation as the island's intellectual and cultural capital. Dominated on its western tip by one of the most imposing Venetian fortresses on the island, the town also retains a picturesque old quarter where a core of traditional urban life continues relatively unaffected. An excellent folklore museum and a fine beach are other reasons for Réthimnon's popularity.

Less desirably, the town is also at the centre of some of Crete's most drastic resort development, with hotels and apartments spreading ever eastwards along a narrow strip of plain which, worryingly, is also one of the most important nesting sites for the endangered loggerhead sea turtle. To the west, the picture is less gloomy, with a sandy **coastline**, still not greatly exploited, running all the way to the borders of Haniá. Journey a little way inland from here and you're on the fringes of the White Mountains (Lefká Óri), studded with traditional hill villages such as **Argiroúpolis** and **Asigonía**, surrounded by some great **hiking** country. Heading inland from Réthimnon in the opposite direction soon brings you to the revered **Moní Arkádhi**, a beautiful, ancient monastery and emblem of Crete's nineteenth-century struggle for independence against the Turks.

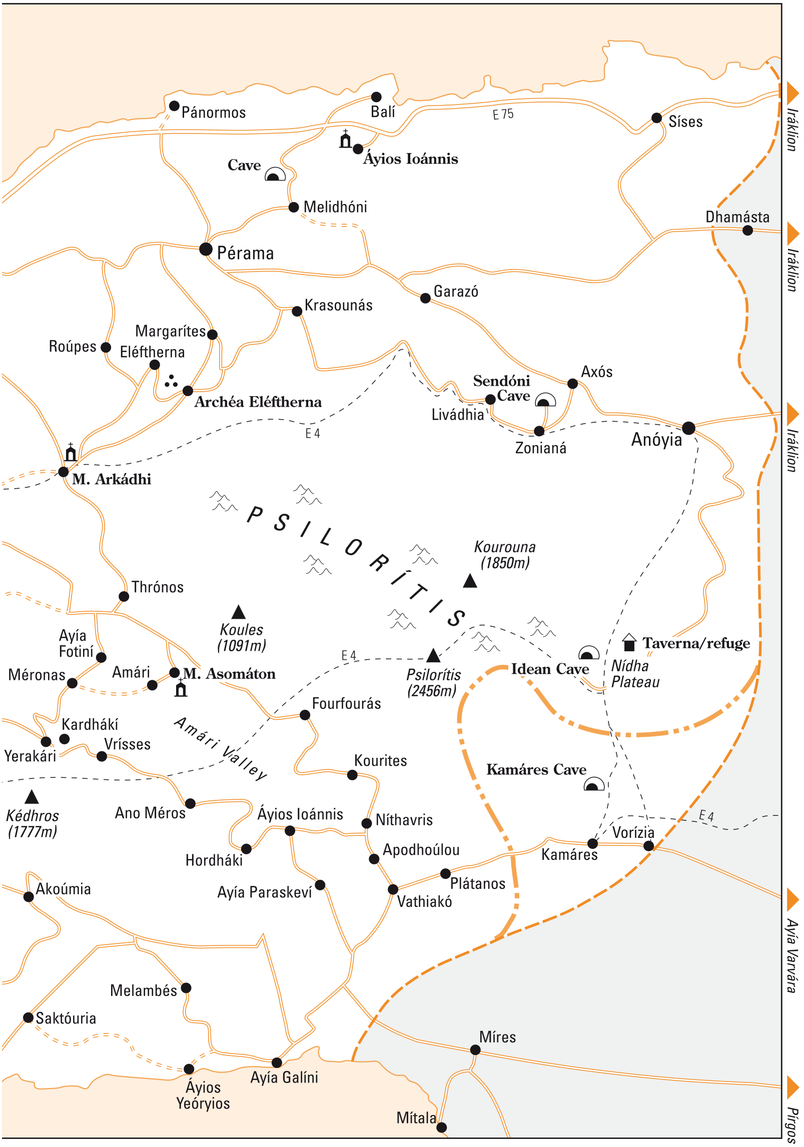
The **interior** of Réthimnon province – perhaps its greatest attraction – is dominated by mountains that provide many of the stunning vistas to be seen at almost every turn along the numerous winding roads. The provincial borders are defined by the island's highest peaks, in the west by the far reaches of the Lefká Óri and to the east by the looming mass of Psilorítis, Crete's highest peak. The villages ranged around the **Psilorítis massif** provide ideal bases for a series of spectacular wilderness hikes originating from them. A few days here are strongly recommended, for casual ramblers and committed hikers alike. The peaks themselves are approached most easily from **Anóyia**, a high mountain town known for its sheep-breeding, weaving and embroidery. From here, you can hike across to the south side of the mountains or down, via the summit of Psilorítis, to the pretty villages of the lushly fertile **Amári valley** – some of the least visited and most traditional places in Crete.

To the west of the valley, the attractive hill town of **Spíli** is another centre for walkers, with many fine hikes in the surrounding hills and, for the more adventurous, the possibility of a longer trek down the Megapótamos river valley to **Moní Préveli**, an illustrious seaside monastery that played a pivotal role during the Battle of Crete – the monks rescued trapped Allied troops and enabled their evacuation from the nearby **Palm Beach**, one of the island's most picturesque strands.

For spending time by the sea, the province's **south coast** has the most to offer, with two flagship resorts, the glitzy and rumbustious **Ayía Galíni** and its rapidly

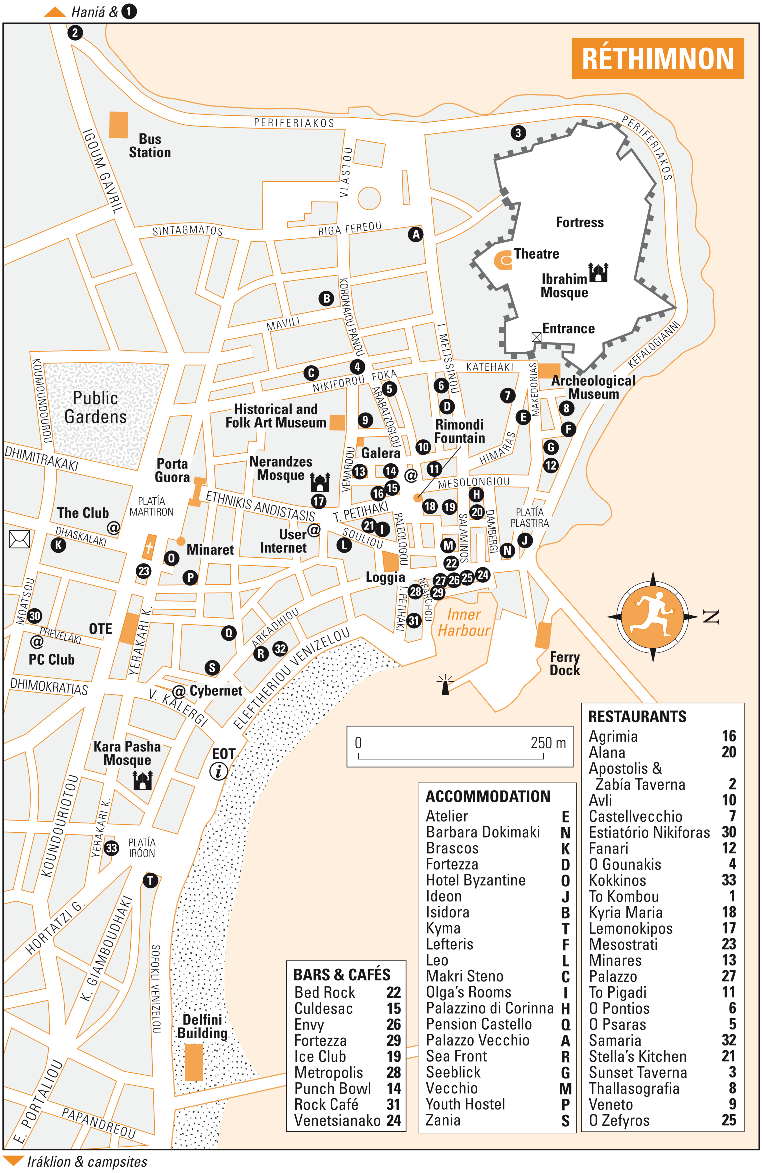

RÉTHIMNON
N
Réthimnon
Perivólia
Piyí
Loutrá
Yeráni
E 75
Haniá
Haniá
Kournás
Imbros
Hóra Sfakion
Episkopí
Arhontikí
Pátima
Kato
Póros
Argiroúpolis
Asigonía
Miriokéfala
Vilanendrédo
Minoan
Cemetery
Arméni
E 4
Ano Valsamónero
Áyios
Konstantínos
Cave
Patsós
Karínes
Lampiní
Soros
(1186m)
Mixórrouma
Spíli
Áyia Pelayía
E 4
Kánevos
Kotsifoú
Gorge
Kourtaliótiko
Gorge
Megálopotamos
Mourné
Fratí
Krioneritis
(1312m)
Selliá
Mírthios
Asómatos
Rodhákino
E 4
Plakiás
Lefkóyia
Koráka
E 4
Damnóni
M. Préveli
Drímiskos
Skhínaria
Beach
Palm Beach
Asideroto
(1162m)
Triopétra
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Áyios Pávlos
0
10 km

emerging and more easy-going rival, **Plakiás**. Along the stretch of coast between these enclaves are a string of little-known pockets of sand – sometimes with a village attached – often hard to access but well worth it for a few lazy days.


Pánormos
Balí
E 75
Síses
Iráklion
Áyios Ioánnis
Cave
Melidhóni
Dhamásta
Iráklion
Pérama
Garazó
Krasounás
Margarítes
Roúpes
Eléftherna
Archéa Eléftherna
Axós
Sendóni Cave
Livádhia
E 4
Zonianá
Anóyia
Iráklion
M. Arkádhi
PSILORÍTIS
Kourouna (1850m)
Thrónos
Koules (1091m)
Ayía Fotiní
Méronas
Amári
M. Asomáton
E 4
Psilorítis (2456m)
Idean Cave
Taverna/refuge
Nídha Plateau
Fourfourás
Kardhákí
Vrísses
Yerakári
Amári Valley
Kourites
Kamáres Cave
Kédhros (1777m)
Ano Méros
Áyios Ioánnis
Níthavris
E 4
Vorízia
Hordháki
Apodhoúlou
Kamáres
Akoúmia
Ayía Paraskeví
Plátanos
Vathiakó
Ayía Varvára
Melambés
Saktóuria
Míres
Áyios Yeóryios
Ayía Galíni
Mítala
Pírgos

Réthimnon and around

Although it's the third largest town in Crete, **RÉTHIMNON** never feels like a city, as Haniá and Iráklion do. Instead, it has a provincial air; it's a place that moves slowly and, for all the myriad bars springing up along the sea front, preserves much


RÉTHIMNON
Haniá & 1
Spili
Veli Pasha Mosque
Iráklion & campsites
PERIFERIAKOS
IGOUM GAVRIL
Bus Station
VLASTOU
SINTAGMATOS
RIGA FEREOU
KORONAIOU PANOU
MAVILI
Fortress
Theatre
Ibrahim Mosque
Entrance
KEFALOGIANNI
KATEHAKI
I. MELISSINOU
MAKEDONIAS
Archeological Museum
NIKIFOROU FOKA
ARABATZOGLOU
Historical and Folk Art Museum
Public Gardens
KOUMOUNDOUROU
DHIMITRAKAKI
Porta Guora
Nerandzes Mosque
Galera
Rimondi Fountain
HIMARAS
MESOLONGIOU
VENARDOU
ETHNIKIS ANDISTASIS
T. PETIHAKI
PLATÍA MARTIRON
The Club
DHASKALAKI
Minaret
User Internet
SOULIOU
PALEOLOGOU
SALAMINOS
DAMBERGI
PLATÍA PLASTIRA
Loggia
NEARCHOU
I. PETIHAKI
Inner Harbour
Ferry Dock
N
MOATSOU
PREVELAKI
OTE
PC Club
YERAKARI K.
ARKADHIOU
ELEFTHERIOU VENIZELOU
DHIMOKRATIAS
V. KALERGI
Cybernet
EOT
Kara Pasha Mosque
KOUNDOURIOTOU
PLATÍA IRÓON
HORTATZI G.
K. GIAMBOUDHAKI
SOFOKLI VENIZELOU
Delfini Building
E. PORTALIOU
PAPANDREOU
0 250 m

RESTAURANTS	
Agrimia	16
Alana	20
Apostolis & Zabía Taverna	2
Avli	10
Castellvecchio	7
Estiatório Nikiforas	30
Fanari	12
O Gounakis	4
Kokkinos	33
To Kombou	1
Kyria Maria	18
Lemonokipos	17
Mesostrati	23
Minares	13
Palazzo	27
To Pigadi	11
O Pontios	6
O Psaras	5
Samaria	32
Stella's Kitchen	21
Sunset Taverna	3
Thallasografia	8
Veneto	9
O Zefyros	25

ACCOMMODATION	
Atelier	E
Barbara Dokimaki	N
Brascos	K
Fortezza	D
Hotel Byzantine	O
Ideon	J
Isidora	B
Kyma	T
Lefteris	F
Leo	L
Makri Steno	C
Olga's Rooms	I
Palazzino di Corinna	H
Pension Castello	Q
Palazzo Vecchio	A
Sea Front	R
Seeblick	G
Vecchio	M
Youth Hostel	P
Zania	S

BARS & CAFÉS	
Bed Rock	22
Culdesac	15
Envy	26
Fortezza	29
Ice Club	19
Metropolis	28
Punch Bowl	14
Rock Café	31
Venetsianako	24

of its Venetian and Turkish appearance. Arriving, especially if you approach from the east in the evening, it looks exactly as it does in old engravings or in Edward Lear's watercolours – dominated by the bulk of a colossal **Venetian fortress**, the skyline picked out with delicate minarets.

All of this is increasingly under commercial threat, but for the time being it's an enjoyable place to spend some time, with a wide, sandy beach and palm-fringed promenade right in front of the tangled streets of the old town. There are hundreds of tavernas, bars, cafés and discos, but the big hotels are all out of town, stretching for miles along the shore to the east. Staying in town, away from the sea front, you'll find things relatively quiet at night, though noisily animated during the day.

There are a couple of good **museums** to divert you during the day. Within easy striking distance of the city, in the hills to the southeast, is **Moní Arkádhi**, a potent symbol of the Cretan struggle for independence and an atmospheric detour on a journey into the mountainous hinterland of the province. A short way south of town, on the road to the south coast, is a fascinating Minoan cemetery at **Arméni**.

Arrival and information

Most people arrive in Réthimnon by road, turning off the main E75 north coast highway (known as the New Road) and descending the 1km into the town. Arriving **by car**, you can usually find a parking place near Platía Plastíra close to the ferry dock (where there is also a pay car park charging €2 per day), around the public garden (with another pay car park) or in the streets surrounding Platía Iróon at the east end of the sea front. Coming in **by bus**, it's easy to get your bearings from the bus station by walking north along the sea and taking a right along Vlastou, soon followed by a left along Riga Ferou before turning right along Melissinou, or one of the narrower alleys of the old town. If you come **by ferry** you'll arrive more centrally still, at the western edge of the harbour; simply walk into the old town directly ahead of you. The **tourist office** (Mon–Fri 8am–2.30pm, Sat 10am–4pm; ⓣ28310 29148, ⓦwww.rethymnon.com) is only a short walk away from the harbour along the sea front. Here you can pick up maps, timetables and accommodation lists. It's worth noting that the tourist office is **scheduled to move** to the Delfini Building some 300m east along the sea front. This is planned to happen during 2007; however, we have shown both locations on the map in case the move is delayed.

Accommodation

There are many **places to stay** in Réthimnon, with the greatest concentration of **rooms** in the tangled streets west of the inner harbour, between the Rimondi Fountain and the museums. There are also quite a few places on and around Arkadhíou. The higher-category **hotels** are all modern and businesslike; the downmarket hotels are, on the whole, less good value than the rooms places, though more likely to have space – there are several along or just off Arkadhíou. For central, rock-bottom budget accommodation, the only option is the **youth hostel** (see p.240).

The nearest **campsite** is *Camping Elizabeth* (ⓣ28310 28694), a large, pleasant beach site with all facilities about 4km east of town. To get there, take the bus for the hotels (marked *Scaleta/El Greco*) from the bus station.

Around the harbour and the fortress

Atelier Himáras 32 ⓣ28310 24440, ⓔatelier@ret.forthnet.gr. Pleasant en-suite rooms with ceiling fans in a place run by a talented potter who has her studio in the basement and sells her wares in a store on the other side of the building. ②

Barbara Dokimaki Platía Plastíra 7 ⓣ28310 24581 ⓔalicedokk@yahoo.gr. Strange warren of a place, with one entrance at the above address, just off the harbourfront behind the *Ideon*, and another on Dambergi; ask for the better-value top-floor a/c studios with kitchenette and TV. ②–⑥

Fortezza I. Melissinou 16, near the fortress ⓣ28310 55551, ⓦwww.fortezza.gr. Stylish, top-of-the-range but great-value hotel in a central location with everything you'd expect for the price, including a/c rooms, bar, pool and restaurant. With breakfast. ⑥

Ideon Platía Plastíra 10 Ⓣ28310 28667, Ⓦwww.hotelideon.gr. Upmarket hotel in an excellent location just north of the ferry dock – try to get a balcony room with a sea view. All rooms come with a/c and TV, and there's a pool. Advance booking is essential in high season. With breakfast. ⑦

Isidora Mavili 1 Ⓣ28310 26293, Ⓔrithian@otenet.gr. Comfortable, good-value rooms with bath, fridge and kitchenette in a quiet location a couple of blocks below the *Fortezza*. ②

Lefteris Kefalogianni 26 Ⓣ28310 23803. Clean, pleasant pension. Balcony rooms with fans, with and without bath. One-night stays allowed, but renting by the week preferred. ②

Makri Steno Nikiforou Foka 54 Ⓣ28310 55465, Ⓔmakristeno@freemail.gr. Another rambling but nicely renovated mansion, with light, fresh a/c en-suite rooms with fridge and TV (you may need to ask for these) and a huge roof terrace. ②–③

Palazzino di Corinna Dambergi 7–9, near the inner harbour Ⓣ28310 21205, Ⓦwww.corina.gr. Sumptuous luxury suites with a/c, minibar and satellite TV in a stunningly restored Venetian palace; the charming patio has a small pool. Breakfast included. ⑧

Palazzo Vecchio At the junction of Iróon Politehniou and I. Melissinou Ⓣ28310 35351, Ⓦwww.palazzovecchio.gr. A delightful small apartment/studio hotel in a restored Venetian mansion, where beautiful rooms come with full bathroom, a/c and TV; there's also a small pool and complimentary breakfast. Internet bookings get a discount. ⑦

Seeblick Platía Plastíra 17 Ⓣ28310 22478, Ⓦwww.seeblickrethymnon.com. Located on the sea front as you walk round from the inner harbour towards the outer wall of the fortress. En-suite a/c studio rooms come with kitchenette and, if you're lucky, a balcony sea view – there are cheaper rooms without views. Good value for the location, although the owners prefer to rent by the week, and won't even consider a single-night stay in August. ②–③

Vecchio Daliani 4, near the Rimondi Fountain Ⓣ28310 54985, Ⓦwww.vecchio.gr. Elegant Venetian mansion recently and tastefully transformed into an enchanting small hotel with a/c balcony rooms set around a pool. Rooms share small kitchens (one per landing) and the owners are extremely welcoming. With breakfast. ⑤

Along and behind the beach

Pension Castello Karaoli 10 Ⓣ28310 23570, Ⓔcastelo2@otenet.gr. A very pleasant small pension in a 300-year-old Turkish mansion; a/c en-suite rooms come with fridge and TV and there's a delightful patio garden. ③

Kyma Platía Iróon Ⓣ28310 55503, Ⓕ28310 27746. A reasonable-value, modern, sea-front hotel where balcony sea-view a/c rooms have TV and minibar, and there's a small pool. Open all year and when space is tight they put overflow guests in their twin hotel (of the same standard) nearby. Breakfast included. ⑥

Leo Vafe 2 Ⓣ28310 26197. Undergoing substantial renovation at the time of writing, this hotel in another former Venetian mansion has wooden decor, a traditional feel and attractive en-suite rooms. It also has a pleasant bar downstairs. ③

Olga's Rooms Souliou 57 Ⓣ28310 54896, Ⓕ28310 29851. Set in a nice old building with roof garden on this touristy street, the en-suite studios overlooking the sea are very good, with a/c, kitchenette and TV. There are also a/c en-suite rooms and cheaper rooms without bath. Rooms with double beds are slightly cheaper (than two singles) and there's a great breakfast bar below, *Stella's Kitchen* (see p.245). ②–③

Sea Front Arkádhiou 159 Ⓣ28310 51981, Ⓔseafront@rethymnoatcrete.com. Good a/c en-suite rooms in restored old house; some have sea-view balconies (others overlook Arkádhiou), and all with fridge and TV. The welcoming owners have a number of apartments nearby. *Rough Guide* readers can claim a ten percent discount. ②–③

Zania Pavlou Vlastou 3 Ⓣ28310 28169. A refurbished old Venetian mansion, right on the corner of Arkadhíou, run by courteous, French-speaking proprietors. The elegant high-ceilinged rooms come with a/c and their own fridge, but bathrooms are shared. ②

Near the Public Gardens

Brascos Dhaskalaki 1, corner of Moatsou Ⓣ28310 23721, Ⓦwww.brascos.com. Modern and rather bland B-class hotel which often has space when everywhere else is full and is a pretty good deal for what you get: a/c balcony rooms with fridge, hairdryer, satellite TV. Extras include a roof-garden bar and Lilliputian pool. With breakfast. ④

Hotel Byzantine Vosporou 26, near the Porta Guora Ⓣ28310 55609, Ⓦwww.byzantineret.gr. Pleasant rooms with bath and fans in a renovated old Byzantine palace, which also has a tranquil patio bar. ③

Youth Hostel Tombázi 41 Ⓣ28310 22848, Ⓦwww.yhrethymno.com. The cheapest beds (€8) in town, in dormitories or (illegally) on the roof. This hostel is large, clean, friendly and popular, and there's food, free hot showers, Internet access, clothes-washing facilities and even a library in various languages. ①

The City

Réthimnon is a thoroughly enjoyable place to wander around. Although much of it has succumbed to fast-food outlets and supermarkets, the buildings themselves have changed little, and there's still the odd corner where English and German are not automatically spoken. You'll also find a few curious old stores, and craftsmen – often manufacturing *lyras*, the Cretan "violin" – working away in their traditional get-up of high boots, baggy trousers (*vrákes*) and black headscarves (*tsalvária*).

With the outstanding exception of the Venetian fortress, the town's monuments don't amount to a great deal, but walking between them is often every bit as interesting as what you find within. The streets are a fascinating mix of generations of **architecture**, the Venetian buildings indistinguishable most of the time from the Turkish and all of them adapted and added to by later generations. Ornate wooden doors and balconies are recurring features, ancient stonework crops up everywhere, and there are a number of elaborate **Turkish fountains** hidden in obscure corners – one by the Kara Pasha mosque, another below the south side of the fortress at the corner of Smírnis and Koronaíou, two more on Patriárhou Grigoríou leading up from here towards the Public Gardens.

The harbour and the fortress

The Venetian or inner **harbour** is the most attractive part of Réthimnon's waterfront, although these days its elegant sixteenth-century lighthouse looks down on a line of fish tavernas that have taken over the former quayside rather than the sailing ships and barges of bygone eras. The nearby and impressive breakwaters, which are constantly being extended, reveal some of the problems with the harbour. Soon after its completion the Venetians discovered the dock's tendency to silt up, and this has been a constant hindrance ever since: until relatively recently it was unable to handle really big ships or ferries. When the locals decided to set up their own ferry service to Pireás (the first vessel, *Arkadhi*, was bought by public subscription) the whole harbour had to be completely cleared out, and only a constant dredging operation keeps it open. Even now, the ferry is virtually the only large ship to call here and must dock in a specially constructed outer harbour alongside; the inner harbour is today given over to small fishing *kaïkia*, pleasure craft and tourist cruise boats.

If you follow the shoreline round to the west you'll emerge beneath the walls of the massive **Venetian Fortress** (daily 8am–8pm; closes 6pm Nov–March; €3). Said to be the largest Venetian castle ever built, this was a response, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, to a series of pirate raids (by Barbarossa in 1538 and Uluch Ali in 1562 and 1571) which had devastated the town. Designed by the Italian engineer Sforza Pallavicini, the mammoth edifice took a full ten years to build at a crippling cost and was large enough for the entire population to take shelter within its walls. Whether it was effective is another matter; in 1645 the Venetian city fell to the Turks in less than 24 hours (they simply bypassed the fort), and when the English writer Robert Pashley visited in 1834 he found the guns, some of them still the Venetian originals, to be entirely useless. The **entrance** is in the southeastern corner, opposite the Archeological Museum.

As you walk in through the walls you pass what must have been some sort of **guardhouse** within the bastion, and then you emerge into the vast open interior space, dotted with the remains of barracks, arsenals, officers' houses, earthworks and deep shafts. At the centre is a large domed building which was once a **church** and later – following the fall of Réthimon to the Turks – converted into a **mosque** dedicated to then ruling sultan, Ibrahim. The recently renovated church/mosque has a truly fabulous **dome** and a pretty carved *mihrab* (a niche indicating the direction of

Mecca), both of which are Turkish additions. Just to the north of this are some fine arched foundations and a **stairway** leading down to a gate in the seaward defences. This was in theory for resupplying the defenders, but in reality it was through here that the Venetians fled from the Turkish attack. Among the most impressive remains are the **cisterns** where rainwater would have been collected: they are deep and cool, and dimly lit by slits through which shafts of sunlight penetrate. Although much is ruined now, the fort remains thoroughly atmospheric, with **views** from the walls over the town and harbour, or in the other direction along the coast to the west. Walk around the outside, preferably at sunset, to get an impression of its vast bulk; there are more great views along the coast, and a pleasant resting point around the far side at the *Sunset Taverna* (see p.245).

The archeological and historical museums

Réthimnon's **Archeological Museum** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–5pm; €3) lies almost directly opposite the entrance to the fortress. It occupies a building built by the Turks as an extra defence for the entry, and which later served as a prison, but it's now entirely modern inside – cool, spacious and airy. It's worth visiting, especially if you're going to miss the bigger museums in other towns: there's an interesting collection of Minoan pottery and sarcophagi, as well as Roman coins, jewellery, pots and statues, all of them from Réthimnon province. Take a look beneath the central atrium at an unusual unfinished Roman **statue of Aphrodite**, with the sculptor's chisel marks still plainly visible, allowing you to glimpse the goddess's features – never completed – emerging from the stone.

Equally enjoyable is the **Historical and Folk Art Museum** (Mon–Sat 9.30am–2pm & 6–8pm; €3), located in a beautifully restored seventeenth-century Venetian mansion at M. Venardou 28, close to the Nerandzes Mosque. Inside in two rooms are gathered musical instruments (including the *lyra* of Nikos Piskopakis, one of its greatest-ever exponents), old photos, basketry, farm implements, smiths' tools, traditional costumes and jewellery, lace, weaving and embroidery, pottery, knives and old wooden chests. In a section on Cretan tapestry look out for a 1941 work depicting German parachutists landing at Máleme. There's also a quaint island visitors' map from 1965, depicting the island before it was invaded by mass tourism, and in the ceramics section there are early examples of pottery from Margarítes, still one of Réthimnon's most important pottery centres today. It's a fascinating insight into the island's fast-disappearing lifestyles, many of which had survived virtually unchanged from Venetian times to the 1960s.

The rest of the city

The **city centre**, at least as far as tourists are concerned, is the area around the seventeenth-century Venetian **Loggia**, for many years the town museum; it's now home to a shop, selling high-quality (and pricey) reproductions of classical art, but still stands in the midst of shops, restaurants and bars radiating in every direction. The **Rimondi Fountain**, close by at the western end of Paleológou, is also seventeenth-century Venetian. Half-hidden under a blocked-off arcade, the fountain's lion-head spouts still splash water down to a marble bowl, and nowadays they look out over **Platía Petiháki**, one of the liveliest areas in town. South from the fountain, a line of cafés and tavernas leads into Ethníkis Andistásis, the **market** street. Turn right just before this and the backstreets lead to the fine **Nerandzes Mosque**, whose minaret (currently closed for repairs), ascended by a steep spiral stair, has the best views in town. The mosque itself is not open to the public and is used as a music school and concert hall.

Up through the market area, the old city ends at the only surviving remnant of the city walls, the **Porta Guora**. Through the gate you emerge into the busy Platía

Tessáron Martíron with its rather unattractive modern church. Almost directly opposite are the quiet and shady **Public Gardens**, a former Turkish cemetery now laid out with a fine variety of palms and other trees. In July, the gardens play host to the festivities of the **Réthimnon Wine Festival** (see p.246). In the newer parts of town, you'll find two more mosques: **Veli Pasha**, to the southeast of Platía Martíron, has a fine minaret, whilst **Kara Pasha** by Platía Iróon is older, but only part of the facade survives, with a small garden planted in front.

△ Rimondi Fountain

The beach

To find the **beach** you hardly need a guidebook: the broad swathe of tawny sand in the centre of town advertises itself. There are showers and cafés here, and the waters protected by the breakwaters are dead calm (and ideal for kids). Sadly, they're also crowded and often none too clean. Outside the harbour, less sheltered sands stretch for miles to the east, only marginally less crowded but with much cleaner water. Interspersed among the hotels along here is every facility you could need – travel agents, bike rental, bars and restaurants.

Shopping

Most of Réthimnon's **souvenir** stores are along Arkadhíou, Paleológou and Souliou; the market is on Andistásis, while more general stores (including designer clothes shops) line Arkadhíou and Koundouriótou. There's also a **market** on Thursday along Dhimitrakáki, near the Public Gardens. Atelier, attached to the pension of the same name (p.239), sells some creative modern **ceramics** by a local potter, Froso Bora, and more innovative handmade ceramics are on sale at Omodamos, Souliou 3. Nikos Siragas (Ⓦ www.siragas.gr) is an internationally recognized **woodcarver**, and his creative sculptures in olive and carob woods are on show in his gallery-workshop on Tombázi almost opposite the youth hostel. **Shoe shops** are a big feature here, especially selling leather sandals, and prices are reasonable. Souliou also has the most upmarket and varied tourist stores (including one that sells nothing but herbs and herbal remedies). Agrotiko, T. Petihaki 48, near the Rimondi Fountain, also sells herbs and has a wide selection of the island's best **wines**. Réthimnon is also a centre of **lyra** and **laoúto** (lute) production; among the workshops where you can see them being made are Manolis Katsantonis, V. Kalergi 38, near the junction with Arkadhíou, and Yeóryios Papalexakis, Dimakopolou 6, near the Porta Guora. Prices for these beautifully crafted instruments start at €150 but can cost more than €1000. Evelyn Daskalaki, Tombázi 16, near the youth hostel, has a delightful small shop selling decorative church lamps, copper coffee pots and myriad other objets d'art. For beach games and fishing or diving gear, try Spiros Spor on Petiháki.

Official shop **hours** in Réthimnon are Monday, Wednesday and Saturday 8am to 2pm, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 8am to 1pm and 5 to 8pm.

Eating

Immediately behind the town beach are arrayed the most obvious of Réthimnon's **restaurants**, all with illustrated menus out front and most with waiters who will run off their patter in whichever language seems likely to appeal. These places are sometimes reasonable value – especially if you hanker after an "English breakfast" – but they are all thoroughly touristy. Around the inner harbour there's a cluster of rather more expensive and intimate fish tavernas whose greeters are just as persistent as those in the more touristy places at touting for custom. The **kafenía** and tavernas by the Rimondi Fountain and the newer places spreading into the streets all around generally offer better value, although they lack the sea views. There are a couple of good **pizza** places here, too, and a number of old-fashioned *kafenía*, a couple of which serve great yoghurt and honey.

Takeaway food means either plumping for *souvláki* – there are numerous stalls, including a couple on Arkadhíou and Paleológou and *O Platanos* at Petiháki 52 – or buying your own. **Market** stalls are set up daily on Andistásis below the Porta Guora, and there are small general stores scattered everywhere, particularly on Paleológou and Arkadhíou; east along the beach road you'll even find a couple of mini-supermarkets, and there's a fair-sized supermarket on Platía Martíron. The

bakery *I Gaspari*, on Mesolongíou just behind the Rimondi Fountain, sells the usual *tíropita*, cakes and the like, and it also bakes excellent brown, black and rye bread. There's a good *zaharoplastío* on Petiháki, and another at Koundouriótou 49, west of Platía Martíron. Look out throughout town for the wonderful fresh **fruit juices** (especially melon) and shakes, which have become a local speciality.

Inner harbour, Rimondi Fountain and fortress zones

Agrimia Platía Petiháki. Just one of the places touting for your custom as you walk up from the Rimondi Fountain. It's a good place to sit outside, and the food is usually reliable.

Alana Salaminas 11. A romantic, tree-filled courtyard setting for candlelit tables and (mostly) non-Greek food. High prices.

Avli Xanthoudidou 22, just west of the Rimondi Fountain ☎28310 26213. Rethimnon's top restaurant is an upmarket place in a Venetian mansion offering carefully prepared traditional meals (the lamb is recommended) in one of the prettiest and most romantic garden settings in town. Prices are on the high side, though, with the cheapest bottle of wine (on an extensive list) priced at €21; the neighbouring *To Pigadi* (see below) offers better value.

Castellvecchio Himáras 29. Inviting small family taverna, offering the usual dishes and quite a few vegetarian choices. There's also a pleasant terrace with a view over the city.

Fanari Periferiakos 16. Sea-front taverna with a small terrace close to Platía Plastíra, serving the usual staples and fish dishes to a high standard.

Kyria Maria Moshovitou 20. Pleasant, unassuming small restaurant tucked down an alley behind the Rimondi Fountain. After the meal everyone gets a couple of María's delicious *tiropitákia* topped with honey, on the house.

Minares Odhós Vernadou, in the centre of town, right next to the Nerandzes Mosque. A little touristy but very friendly, with reliable food served in a pleasant garden setting.

Palazzo At the inner harbour. One of the nicest places on the harbour, with tables on a rooftop terrace, but rather overpriced.

To Pigadi Xanthoudidou 31 ☎28310 27522. Excellent taverna in the old town, with an attractive garden terrace containing an old well (*pigadi*). Traditional dishes are cooked with style and are reasonably priced and there's a decent wine list.

O Pontios I. Melissinou 34. A tiny, unassuming place near the Archeological Museum and the fortress, serving surprisingly good food – a worthwhile lunchtime stop.

O Psaras Corner of Nikiforou Foka and Koronaíou. An economical and unpretentious fish taverna (although less fish and more meat is served in summer) with tables beside a church.

Samaria Venizélou, almost opposite the tourist office. One of the few sea-front places patronized by locals, serving well-prepared food at reasonable prices.

Stella's Kitchen Souliou 55. A great-value and welcoming little diner, serving up six daily specials (at least two of which are vegetarian); also good for breakfast. Closes at 9pm.

Sunset Taverna On the west side of the fortress. Mostly visited for its views (spectacular sunsets) rather than the food, but the meals aren't bad value and there's usually a decent selection of fish. The terrace tables here are right by the shore – the waiters have to cross the road from the kitchen.

Thallasografia Kefalogianidon 33 ☎28310 52569. Best approached from the car park fronting the fort entrance (although there are steps from the road below) this is a superb "new style" taverna perched on a cliff overlooking the sea and currently the "in" place for *rethimniotes* to dine out (making booking advisable). Tables have sensational views, service is slick and recommended dishes include *arní sti stamna* (jugged lamb) and *loukánika krasata* (sausages in wine).

Veneto Epimenidou 4 ☎28310 56634. Stylish upmarket restaurant in a refurbished Venetian palace which offers wider Mediterranean cuisine as well as Cretan dishes. Decent wine list.

O Zefyros At the inner harbour. Reliable, reasonably priced fish taverna.

The rest of town

Apostolis & Zabía Taverna Junction of Periferiakos and Igoum Gavril, close to the bus station. Highly popular local taverna for meat and fish dishes with a shaded terrace.

Estiatório Nikiforas Moatsou 40, west of the Public Gardens. Typical town *estiatório*, off the tourist trail, where the hearty food is made daily and you choose from the heated trays behind a glass display.

O Gounakis Koronaíou 6 in the old town. Serving hearty, no-frills cooking, the family running this bar/restaurant perform *lyra* concerts every night – when things get really lively, the dancing starts.

Inevitably touristy, but great fun.

Kokkinos Platía Iróon. This taverna is open 24 hours a day and has decent Cretan cuisine. It's often difficult to get a seat at 4am when the bars and clubs close and the place fills with revellers wanting a breakfast *souvláki.*

To Kombou On the edge of Atsipópolou village, 3km southwest of town (take a taxi there and back). An excellent garden taverna, popular with the locals. The Cretan specialities include *spilogáradouma* with *áfogalo* (lamb sausage with a creamy sauce). Open eves only.

Lemonokipos Andistásis 100. A charming garden restaurant concealed behind the street entrance. It serves a variety of tasty meat and fish dishes at tables under the lemon trees, with a decent selection of (pricey) wines.

Mesostrati Yerakári 1, behind the church on Platía Martíron. An excellent and economical little neighbourhood taverna/*ouzerí*, serving well-prepared country dishes on a shady small terrace. Try their tasty moussaká or *loukánika* (sausage).

Drinking, nightlife and entertainment

Bars and **nightlife** are concentrated in the same general areas as the restaurants. At the west end of Venizélou, in the streets behind the inner harbour, pavements soon fill with the overflow from a small cluster of noisy **music bars** where party-goers gather before the nightly opening of the local discos. The café-cum-cocktail places around the Rimondi Fountain are great for people-watching, but the cacophony of late-evening noise from competing bars is less than relaxing. A string of more subdued **cocktail bars** can be found up Salaminos towards the fortress, and there are more of these below the *Ideon* hotel on Platía Plastíra, although students tend to colonize this zone and its terraces during term time. Larger **discos** are mostly out to the east, among the big hotels, but there are one or two in town as well.

Every August the town puts on its **Renaissance Festival** (*Anagennisiakó*). Held in the fortress, it includes folk and classical music concerts and theatrical events, as well as performances of Classical tragedies and comedies; a full programme is available from the tourist office. There's more public entertainment on offer at the annual **wine festival**, staged in the Public Gardens in the second half of July. The nominal entrance fee includes all the wine you can drink from barrels set up around the gardens, with food stalls and entertainment laid on. You'll need to take your own cup or buy one of the souvenir glasses and carafes on offer outside. Although it tends to be rather touristy, the locals go too, and as the evening progresses and the barrels empty, the organized entertainments give way to spectacular displays of local dance steps.

Cafés, bars and discos

Cul de Sac Platía Petiháki. Stylish *kafenío* overlooking Rimondi Fountain. The prices are higher than average, but it's a great place to people-watch over a coffee.

Bed Rock Arkhadhíou 236, near the inner harbour. Music and dance bar with DJ's specializing in live rap. Opens 11.30pm–dawn.

Envy Arkhadhíou 226, opposite *Bed Rock* (above). New dance bar open 11pm till dawn playing a medley of hip hop, house, techno and rock. Serves up explosive cocktails with lots of two-for-one offers.

Fortezza Inner harbour. A big, glitzy disco-bar, where the action kicks in after midnight.

Galera Platía Petiháki. Large beers, toasted sandwiches and snacks served on one of the town's most popular terraces for seeing and being seen.

Ice Club Salaminos, west of the inner harbour. One of the town's bigger music and dance clubs, with an eclectic mix of Greek and western rock, accompanied by strobe-lighting pyrotechnics.

Metropolis Nearchou 24. A loud rock-music bar just round the corner from the *Fortezza*, on an alley which connects with Arkadhíou.

Punch Bowl Arabatzoglou 42. The obligatory Irish pub – pleasant and convivial, and serving draught Guinness.

Rock Café Pethaki 8, near the inner harbour. Big and brash dance club attracting large crowds in high summer.

Venetsianako Close to the old harbour pier at the west side of the inner harbour. Stylish place where the smartly dressed locals go for morning, noon or afternoon coffee and – in the evenings – candlelit tables and disco sounds.

Listings

Airlines Olympic Airways, Koumoundourou 5 (ⓣ28310 22257), behind the Public Gardens. For Aegean Airways flights enquire at the travel agents (see p.248). Buses bound for Hanía airport leave from the Olympic Airways office two-and-a-quarter hours before flight departures; confirm exact bus times in advance with the Olympic office.

Banks ATMs are to be found throughout the centre; the National Bank, at the foot of Dhimokratias to the west of the Public Gardens, has a 24hr ATM which takes MasterCard and Eurocard. Over the road, the Interamerican Bank has another ATM, with more along nearby Koundouriótou.

Bike rental Motorbike and scooter rental outlets around town include Stavros, Paleológou 14 (ⓣ28310 22858), which also rents out mountain bikes; and Motor Club, S. Venizélou 2 (ⓣ28310 54253), at the eastern end of the seafront. Hellas Sports, S. Venizélou 67 (ⓣ28310 71861, ⓦwww.hellassports.org), organizes one-day downhill (the Scott mountain bikes go "up" on a trailer) biking excursions to the White Mountains, Arkádhi, Kournás, Psiloritis, Argiroúpolis and elsewhere.

Boat trips The *Dolphin Express* (€20 adults/€10 under-12s) sails four times daily to Pánormos, Balí and the Skaléta "pirate" caves; there are also trips to Yeoryioúpolis, as well as evening cruises and fishing expeditions. The *Captain Hook* and its sister ship the *Barbarossa* make similar trips in more touristy "Jolly Roger" vessels, complete with sails, which are great for kids (adults €34, kids €17, including lunch). Both are located on the inner harbour.

Car rental Ellotia Tours, Arkádhiou 155 (ⓣ28310 51981, ⓦwww.forthnet.gr/elotia) are reliable; rates for a Fiat 600 start at €180 per week, with a ten-percent discount for *Rough Guide* readers with this Guide. Motor Club, S. Venizélou 2 (ⓣ28310 54253), is a good alternative.

Cinema There are several cinemas, including the open-air Asteria on I. Melissinou beneath the south side of the fortress, and Cinema Pandelis (aka Cineland) on the main road out towards Iráklion, which shows new-release films, many in their original-language versions.

Diving Diving and snorkelling trips plus PADI courses for beginners are offered by the Paradise Dive Centre, Arkadhíou 263 (ⓣ28310 53258, ⓔpdcr@otenet.gr). A one-day introduction to scuba diving costs around €80, including tuition, equipment and transport to their south-coast dive base near Plakiás. The PADI certificated Kalypso, Sofoklés Venizelou 42, near Platía Iróon (ⓣ28310 20990, ⓦwww.kalypsodivingcenter.com) is similar and also dives near Plakiás.

Ferries The retirement of its sister ship means that there are currently only three sailings per week (Tues, Thurs, Sun at 8pm) to Pireás by the *Préveli*. It is expected that a new vessel will come into service during 2007 in order to restore daily sailings. For details of this and tickets for ferries to Pireás as well as Kastélli, Yíthio (Gythion), Kíthira and Kalamáta, visit the very helpful Ellotia Tours at Arkadhíou 155 (ⓣ28310 51981, ⓦwww.rethymnoatcrete.com). The *Atlantis* and *Golden Prince* also make one-day cruises to Santoríni (Thíra), currently on Tues & Sat costing around €75, which includes breakfast (boats sail at 7am) and evening meal. The ANEK Lines office is located at Arkadhíou 250 (ⓣ28310 29221, ⓦwww.anek.gr).

Internet access The most central cybercafé is *Galero*, on Platía Petiháki by the Rimondi Fountain (daily 9am–midnight). Other possibilities are *The Club*, Platía Martíron 3 (daily 8am–5pm); *PC Club*, Preveláki 10 slightly southeast of Platía Martíron (open 24hr daily); *Cybernet*, Kalergi 44 (open 24hr daily); and *User Internet*, Ethnikis Andistaseos 83 (9am–2pm & 6–10pm).

Laundry Laundry-Mat at Tombázi 45 by the youth hostel charges €7.50 to wash, dry and fold up to 5kg (Mon–Sat 8am–2.15pm & 5–9pm; ⓣ28310 56196).

Left luggage The long-distance bus station has a small office (Mon–Fri 6.30am–9pm, Sat & Sun 8.30am–5pm); €1 per item per 24hr.

Mountain climbing and walking The local EOS is at Dhimokratias 12 (ⓣ28310 22655); besides advice on climbing, it also organizes walking tours. Walking tours from one day to two weeks are offered by The Happy Walker, Tombázi 56 (ⓣ28310 52920, ⓦwww.happywalker.com), a Dutch operation located near the youth hostel. Single-day walks cost €28 and include a taxi/minibus to and from your hotel to the walk start point.

Newspapers and books Foreign newspapers are sold at several places along the sea front. Best for these, and a selection of books in English, is International Press at the junction of Arkhadhíou and I. Petiháki (not to be confused with Platía T. Petiháki). News Stand, Platía Agnostou 31 (the western continuation of Platía Iróon), also sells foreign press and has a good selection of books in English. Handy places for secondhand English-language books are Palaiobibliopoleío, at Souliou 43, in the old town and Tripoligakis, Arabatzoglou 51, west of the Rimondi Fountain.

Pharmacies Plenty of pharmacies are scattered about the main shopping streets, especially

Koundouriótou and Arkadhíou. Check the rota on the door for late/weekend opening. The tourist office has a list of English-speaking doctors.

Post office The main post office (Mon–Fri 7.30am–8pm) is in a smart new building on Moátsou, opposite the *Brascos* hotel.

Taxis There are ranks in Platía Tessáron Martíron and Platía Iróon, or call ☎ 28310 25000 for a radio taxi.

Telephones The OTE office is at Koundouriótou 28 (daily 7am–10pm).

Toilets There are clean public toilets on the beach by the tourist office, and others opposite the Loggia and in the Public Gardens.

Travel agents There are several travel agents along Paleológou, Arkhadhíou and Koundouriótou, and also around Platía Iróon and along Venizélou. The following can all arrange excursions and domestic flight and ferry tickets: Ellotia Tours, Arkadhíou 155 behind the sea front (☎ 28310 51981); Creta Connection, Kallergi 15 (☎ 28310 24977); and Apoplous Travel, Giampoudaki 11 (☎ 28310 20476). You'd do better to arrange international flights in Haniá or Iráklion.

The Monastery of Arkádhi

Of all the short trips that you could take from Réthimnon, the most worthwhile is to the **Monastery of Arkádhi** (daily 8am–8pm; €2), some 25km southeast of the city in the foothills of the Psiloritis range. Arkádhi is something of a national Cretan shrine to the nineteenth-century struggle for independence – aside from its historical resonance, the monastery's striking architecture and highly scenic location are reason enough to visit.

The monastery and its history

Before its notoriety, Arkádhi was one of the richest monasteries in Crete and a well-known stopover for travellers (grouchy Edward Lear spent one of his better-tempered nights here), as well as being a centre of resistance. Pashley relates a story of events in the 1820s, when eighty Muslims, who had occupied the monastery to pacify local rebels, were captured and put to death; in retaliation, many of the buildings were burned.

During the **1866 rebellion** Arkádhi served as a Cretan stronghold in which, as the Turks took the upper hand, hundreds of Cretan guerrillas and their families took refuge. Here they were surrounded by a Turkish army until, after a siege of two days, the defences were finally breached on November 9, 1866. As the attackers poured in, the ammunition stored in the monastery exploded – deliberately fired, according to the accepted version of events, on the orders of the abbot. Hundreds were killed in the initial blast, Cretan and Turk alike, and most of the surviving defenders were put to death by the enraged assailants. The following year the British philhellene J. Hilary Skinner, fighting with the insurgents, could still describe "scores of bodies unburied, half-buried, sun-dried, and mangled, to be seen within the monastery". That he was here at all is proof of the international sympathy for the cause of **Cretan independence** which this ultimate expression of the cry of "Freedom or Death" did much to promote. Figures as disparate as Victor Hugo, Garibaldi and the poet Swinburne were moved to public declarations of support, and in Britain money was raised for a ship (the *Arkádhi*) to run the Turkish blockade. Though Crete's liberty was still some way off at that stage, today the monastery remains the most potent symbol of the struggle (there are celebrations of the anniversary of the blast on November 7–9 each year). More recently the monastery lent assistance to guerrilla fighters during **World War II**: George Psychoundákis, for example, describes handing over supplies from a parachute drop to the monks.

Nowadays you can peer into the roofless **vault** beside the cloister where the explosion took place, and wander about the rest of the well-restored grounds. Despite the carnage, the bulk of the monastery buildings, including the others around the central cloister, were relatively unscathed and Arkádhi is still a working monastery. Of the surviving buildings the **church** is the most impressive, its rich mix of styles placing it among the finest Venetian structures left in Crete. Its highly decorative facade, dating from 1587, used to feature on the Greek 100-drachma note; it seems startlingly out-of-place, isolated here in the Cretan countryside. The rest of the monastery is mainly seventeenth-century (though it was originally founded as early as the eleventh) and more familiar in layout and style. Across the courtyard from the scene of the explosion a small **museum** (same ticket) devoted to the exploits of the defenders of the faith contains a variety of mementos and tributes, blood-stained clothing and commemorative medals.

Practicalities

Transport to Arkádhi is straightforward. In addition to all the tours, there are three daily **buses** from Réthimnon (two at weekends). Give yourself a few hours for an unhurried visit plus perhaps a picnic lunch or a meal at the taverna (see below). In high summer buses can be crowded but **hitching** a lift back to Réthimnon should be no problem. There's also a route from here south to **Thrónos** in the Amári valley (see p.272), reached via an asphalted road. To pick it up head west from the monastery grounds towards Hárkia; after a couple of hundred metres the Thrónos road is signed on the left.

With your own transport, the **old road** up to Arkádhi is an attractive trip in itself. Take the route east out of Réthimnon via Perivólia and then follow the signs at Plataniás which lead under the highway towards the monastery via Ádhele and Piyí. As you climb into the foothills, the road and the valley through which it runs gradually narrow until, at the end, it's a real ravine. This opens out quite suddenly into the small plain at the centre of which stands the monastery. You'll pass a modern monument to the martyrs of independence – with displayed human skulls – and arrive at a huge spreading tree where the bus stops and cars park. There is **food** available at a rather unappealing cafeteria-taverna, and this is also a quiet place to picnic, either on benches around the outside of the monastery or out in the meadows which surround it. There's an inviting **alternative route** back to the coast through some picturesque wooded hill country dotted with interesting villages. Directly in front of the monastery a paved road cuts away to the northeast before it reaches Eléftherna, 5km away, and ancient Eléftherna (see p.259), followed by the potters' village of Margarítes (see p.258).

Arméni Minoan cemetery

The road south across the island, towards Plakiás or Ayía Galíni, takes off from the very centre of Réthimnon, running along the side of the Public Gardens and then climbing rapidly above the town. Look back from the final bend and you have the city, its castle and harbour laid out like a map below you, with the sea behind. Once you've passed the large service station which marks the end of the populated north coast, the road winds scenically into the back-country of rural Crete.

A little under 10km from Réthimnon, just before the village of **Arméni**, a sign to the right points the way to a remarkable **Minoan cemetery** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; free). Important discoveries have been made here in over two hundred rock-cut tombs dating from the Late Minoan period, after the fall of the great palaces. Pleasantly sited today in a shady oak wood, most of the tombs are of the *drómos* (passage) and chamber type. One large tomb on the south side of the site which the guide will point out has a spectacular *drómos* and finely cut chamber, and may well have belonged to a royal personage. Some other tombs had only the *drómos* cut, and work on them seems for some reason to have been abandoned. Many *lárnakes* (clay coffins) and grave goods found in the tombs – including weapons, jewellery, vases and a rare helmet made from boar's tusks – are now on display in the archeological museums at Réthimnon and Iráklion. One mystery yet to be solved regarding the cemetery remains: the location of the sizeable settlement which provided this necropolis with its customers.

Some 12km further south at the Koxaré junction is a **café** and truck stop marking a turn-off west on a road through the village of Koxaré to Plakiás via the Kourtaliótiko gorge and Asómatos – the route taken by buses. This café is the best place to change buses if you are travelling between Ayía Galíni and Plakiás or vice versa (there's a timetable posted outside), and is also a good spot to get a lift with passing tourists or a local truck. With your own transport you've got the option of taking another gorge route to Plakiás by continuing from Koxaré to Áyios Ioánnis and turning south down the Kotsifoú gorge, passing through Mírthios en route. Either way, the drive through the gorges is pretty spectacular. Sticking to the main road south from Arméni leads after a further 8km to the attractive little town of **Spíli** (see p.268) and eventually Ayía Galíni (see p.278).

West of Réthimnon

Heading **west** from Réthimnon the roads are easy and efficient, but offer little in the way of diversion. As you leave the city, you immediately start to climb; within a couple of kilometres the **old road** to Haniá peels off to head inland with opportunities to visit some charming villages such as **Argiroúpolis** and **Asigonía**.

The main E75 **highway** carries on above the coast before dropping back to sea level at **Yeráni**, 6km from Réthimnon, with a rocky cove good for swimming. There's a sign here to the Yeráni cave, site of a Neolithic cult rediscovered when the road was built, but the cave is not actually open to the public. Beyond, after another brief flirtation with the hills, the road finally levels out beside the **Gulf of Almirós**, from where it traces the shore, flat and straight, the rest of the way to Yeoryioúpolis (see p.327). A long and windswept **sandy beach** follows it all the way, separated from the road by straggling bushes of oleander; there are frequent spaces to pull over and park if you want a swim, and just a few new developments beginning to spring up. The beach itself is virtually deserted much of the way, but there can be dangerous currents so don't venture too far out; it gets further from the road and considerably more sheltered as you approach the development at Yeoryioúpolis.

Via the old road to Argiroúpolis

The scenic **old road** which heads southwest from Réthimnon is by comparison quite populous. You'll pass through five or six prosperous little villages before arriving, after 23km, at **Episkopí**, something of a local market centre with narrow, twisting hilly streets at its heart that test the clutch control of drivers. Here you're approaching the foothills of the White Mountains, which rise with increasing majesty ahead. You probably wouldn't want **to stay** in the village itself, but 2km below it on the road heading north to the sea, *Villa Pirgos* and *Villa Avra* (☎21080 72267, or 6947074657 for both; both €220–250 per night ⑨), are attractive sea-view apartments sleeping up to ten with pool, on a hill above the nearby beach, which lies across the E75 highway. From Episkopí a road runs up to some of the smaller villages, a rarely travelled route where the old life continues, and where there are good opportunities for **hiking** in the surrounding hills.

Continuing west, beyond Episkopí, the old road soon divides, the main way descending steadily towards Yeoryioúpolis, a secondary route climbing through the village of Kournás (see p.332) and then dropping steeply to the lake.

A turn-off at Episkopí (or along a signed bypass which avoids the latter's narrow streets) heads **south** towards Argiroúpolis.

Argiroúpolis

ARGIROÚPOLIS, 6km south of Episkopí, is a strikingly scenic village with a split personality: the lower half is located around its famous springs, while the upper village is founded on the ruins of the prestigious ancient Greco-Roman city of Lappa. With lovely views over the Mouséllas river valley and surrounded by some fine walking country in the foothills of the White Mountains, it is one of the most attractive villages in this part of Crete. **Buses** to Argiroúpolis (Mon–Fri only) leave from Réthimnon at 11.30am and 2.30pm, and travel in the opposite direction (from the upper village) at 7am, 12.30pm and 3.30pm.

The lower village

The **lower village**, reached by taking a right downhill when you come to a fork (the Asigonía road), effectively comprises five **tavernas** in a spectacular wooded setting where gushing springwater cascades in every direction from the hill above. Vegetation is abundant in this fertile environment and, as well as great numbers of chestnut and plane trees, there are even banana plants. The roar of water is impressive; there's so much of it here that it supplies the whole of the town of Réthimnon, as signs inform you. The tavernas have all incorporated water features into their terraces – walls of tumbling water, oriental wooden water bells, water wheels and the like. The whole scene is especially magical at night with lights illuminating the foliage above.

All the tavernas are good, but for added interest you might visit the *Vieux Moulin*, downhill from the others, which is owned by Argiroúpolis's ebullient ex-mayor, Stelios Manousakas, who is a voluble expert on all things to do with the village and frequently corrects the archeologists working locally on their facts. Close to the *Vieux Moulin*, and accidentally discovered in 1994 by a British team, is a remarkable seventeenth-century Venetian **fulling mill** complete with a rare wooden fulling machine. Once driven by water from the spring, it was used for shrinking, beating and preparing cloth. It is hoped that, eventually, this unique

△ Argiroúpolis main square and church

piece of Crete's industrial history will be restored and opened up to the public. To find the mill, go through the restaurant's grounds and pass through a black metal gate into a road. A chapel in the field opposite is fronted by a Roman pillar; turn left downhill, where you'll see a blue pole carrying electricity cables. Turn right here and opposite the next pole you'll find the ruined mill. Between the fulling mill and the springs are the scanty remains of the **Roman baths** of ancient Lappa – ask at the taverna if you have problems finding these.

The upper village

Argiroúpolis's **upper village**, reached by taking the left fork uphill (or by climbing a path which ascends steps from the springs), lies around its tranquil square overlooked by the elegant seventeenth-century Venetian church of **Áyios Ioánnis**, with an extended section to the south enjoying views over the river valley. This segment of the village is built over the celebrated ancient city of **Lappa**, parts of which have recently been revealed, and archeologists have been busy over recent years excavating and documenting the city's ancient necropolis in the valley to the north, where they have unearthed a wealth of grave goods. Originally a Dorian settlement, Lappa was an ally of Lyttos (see p.132) in the latter's wars against Knossós. When it fiercely opposed the Roman invasion in 67 BC, the city was destroyed by the conquering legions. Later, when Lappa aided Octavian-Augustus in his struggle against Antony for the control of the Roman world, the victorious emperor permitted the Lappans to rebuild their town and gifted them a **water reservoir** in 27 BC which, incredibly, still supplies the village today. The city flourished for many centuries, even outlasting Roman rule, but was razed again by the Saracens in the ninth century. It recovered during the Venetian occupation and was an important centre, as is evident from the numerous villas left behind by Venetian landlords. Remnants of buildings from all periods of the village's history have been incorporated into most of the houses: you'll spot classical inscriptions, ancient columns and bits of Venetian stone carving in the most unlikely places.

You can begin a **tour** of the upper village in the main square, opposite the church. Pass beneath a stone arch where there is a store, Lappa Avocado, selling local wine, herbs and olive oil as well as various avocado products. They can also give you an excellent free village **map**. Beyond the arch, keep ahead to pass an elegant Venetian dwelling (perhaps part of the once extensive villa of the Clodio family) on the left with a **fine portal** bearing the legend *Omnia Mundi Fumus et Umbra* (All Things in This World are Smoke and Shadow). The street eventually climbs and the houses become brilliant white. This is not a tourist village however, and discreet glances inside open doorways will reveal the everyday work of the village women – rolling *bourekákia* pastries for the evening meal, peeling corncobs, or embroidering and repairing family clothing. This route will lead you past more crumbling Venetian houses, some being refurbished, to a superb **Roman mosaic floor** beneath a canopy on a street corner. Part of a third-century bath house, its quality is not only an indication of the wealth of the ancient town, but also of how much still lies buried beneath the modern village. Following the same street around the hill leads back to the arch and the main square.

At the south end of the upper village, beyond the church (itself flanked by more excavations from ancient Lappa), the village's **folk museum** (daily 10am–7pm; free) is worth a look. Assembled by the Zografakis family who have lived in Argiroúpolis for generations, the collection includes tapestries, farm implements, photos and ephemera, much of it passed down from their ancestors.

Heading downhill from the west side of the square along narrow, stepped streets, you come to a smaller square (the old **market place**), with a couple of tiny churches en route. At the northern end of the village beyond the *Agnantema* pension (see below), a pleasant walk will bring you to the delightful chapel of **Áyios Nikólaos**, dating from the eleventh century with fourteenth-century frescoes by Ioánnis Pagoménos (John the Frozen). To get there, take the first track on the right off the road beyond the pension which descends into the valley; then take the first track on the left and descend to the church (which is unlocked), some 300m further.

Around Argiroúpolis

Ancient Lappa's **necropolis** lies just over a kilometre north of the town and can be reached by a signed footpath from the upper village. Located at a site known as the Five Virgins, after a nearby chapel, here hundreds of **tombs** – currently being investigated by archeologists – have been cut into the rock cliffs, many of them with elaborate interior and exterior decoration. One opened only recently – after its discovery by a goatherd – was found to contain a stunning gold diadem. The chapel takes its name from five young women put to death by the Romans in the third century for secretly practising Christianity in the tombs. The village commemorates their martyrdom on the first Tuesday after Easter when local shepherds bring their lambs to the shrine to be blessed, and fresh sheep's milk is boiled on site and drunk by those attending. Nearby, alongside yet another spring, stands a gigantic 2000-year-old **plane tree** (claimed by locals to be the oldest in Crete), with a path cut through it.

One place worth a walk or a drive is the nearby village of **Káto Póros**, a kilometre east as the crow flies, but a bit more by road. Delightfully bucolic and relatively untouched by the outside world, the village has quite a few ancient dwellings, many sprouting the uniquely Cretan herb *díktamos* (dittany) from cracks in their walls. There's even a small **taverna**, *Sarakas*, which will rustle up rations of whatever beast happens to have been slaughtered on a chopping block in the back.

Practicalities

In the midst of such spectacular walking terrain, anywhere else in Europe you would probably not be able to move for hikers. But here there's usually no problem finding a room – in fact you're spoilt for choice. A couple of excellent tavernas overlooking the Mousselás river valley to the south both offer **rooms**. First is *Rooms Zografakis* (ⓣ28310 81269, ⓦwww.ezografakis.gr; ② including breakfast) with en-suite balcony rooms with fridge and TV, whilst further along 🏃*Agnantema* (ⓣ28310 81172; ②) has good-value, air-conditioned, en-suite balcony rooms with fridge and TV – rooms 1 and 2 are the ones to go for – with a fantastic view down the valley from its taverna terrace, probably giving it the edge for location. Down near the springs, *Rooms Argiroupolis* (ⓣ28310 81148, ⓔmrom@mia.gr; ③ with breakfast) is another good option, with en-suite rooms backing a large garden. *Apartments Alevizakis* (ⓣ28310 81183; ③), just before the fork for the upper and lower villages (see opposite), has attractive apartments with TV and kitchenette and will allow stays of one night. For stays of more than one night a number of other attractive **apartments** and houses are available in the village, for which Lappa Avocado (ⓣ28310 81070 or 28310 81264), the shop beneath the arch on the square, can provide information. For **food**, besides the tavernas mentioned above and those by the springs, the village's main bar on the square can rustle up a range of *mezhédes* and a good breakfast. The best taverna by far in these parts, however, is 🏃*O Kipos Tis Arkoúdainas* (ⓣ28310 61607) on the main road between Episkopí and Argiroúpolis close to the village of Arhontikí. The brainchild of a chef who trained and worked in Athens before returning to his home village, the restaurant specializes in creative lamb or pork dishes (cooked in a traditional brick oven) and has a delightful tree-shaded garden. At weekends there are performances of traditional Cretan and Greek music.

The vendettas of the Lefká Óri

Crete's Lefká Óri, or **White Mountains**, breed a race of folk among the toughest in Greece – people whom, so the Cretan saying goes, neither know how to forgive nor forget. **Blood feuds** are common in these mountainous regions, and resemble those of Sicily in the tight-lipped attitude towards authority that the locals adopt when outsiders from down below come prying. Fear of retribution is so great that no one wants to talk when the police attempt to investigate the acts of brutality that these feuds inspire.

The culmination of one long-running vendetta saw **Yiannis Mouzourakis**, a shepherd from Asigonía, take to the hills with his rifle in 1994 threatening to avenge the rape and murder of his mother and the death of his brother (both had been killed in an inter-family feud over grazing rights). The brother, father and cousin of the murderers were later found shot dead. When pursued, Mouzourakis sent a message to the police saying that he would be willing to give himself up, but only when he had completed the vendetta by killing the remaining relatives on his list.

The most notorious feud of all, between the Sfakían **Satzekakis and Pendaris families**, started in the 1940s and left 150 people dead before it finally ended in 1988. In recent years riot police have been sent out from Athens to patrol the pastures here, where sheep and goat rustling still provokes venomous disputes, and in Sfakiá some villages have been completely abandoned because of vendettas. Although the number of murders has declined over recent years, there are few who believe that the vendettas will ever end.

A number of superb **walks** can be done around Argiroúpolis, many facilitated by the Petrákis *Réthimnon* map (see p.65). Seriously adventurous hikers can make a trek along the Pan-European E4 Footpath south along the Moussélas valley to follow the Kalikratiano Gorge, which reaches the sea around 25km away at Frangokástello (see p.367). A track branches east off this to the resort of Plakiás (see p.282). Information on these and other walks in the area is available from Lappa Avocado (see p.252).

Miriokéfala

The road south from Argiroúpolis (leading out of the upper village beyond the church) allows visits to more villages and interesting churches. After 7km – with possible stops en route to explore the hamlets of Marouloú and Arolíthi just off the road to left and right – the road passes through **Miriokéfala**, whose former monastery church of the **Panayía Antifonitria** has ancient **Byzantine frescoes** which are among the earliest examples of the period on the island. The tiny drum-domed edifice – located in a courtyard at the bottom of the village – has frescoes depicting the Passion dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and its icon of the Virgin is held in great veneration locally. The church should be open, but the bar a little further along will be able to advise if not.

With your own transport you can take a stunningly **scenic route** (also serving as the Pan-European E4 footpath for this stretch) heading west from here, via the outlying hamlets of Kallikrátis and Ásfendos. This eventually joins up with the main Hánia–Hora Sfakíon road, just north of the village of Imbros with its beautiful gorge and accommodation possibilities (see p.364). From Miriokéfala to Kallikrátis the way is rough but not impassable by car and asphalted in parts, beyond which the 17km to Imbros is now asphalt. Alternatively, the former track from Asigonía (see opposite) to Imbros has been recently asphalted and makes for a smoother ride.

Asigonía

Beyond the tavernas in the lower village at Argiroúpolis (see p.251), the road continues southwest for 6km to **Asigonía**, an isolated rustic settlement at the end of a perpetually cloudy cul-de-sac. The superbly scenic road winds through the verdant cleft of the Gipari gorge, where trees thrust skywards from a riverbed flowing with water all winter, but which lies arid in the summer drought. This habitat breeds a profusion of birdlife: as well as blue rock thrushes, pipits and the ubiquitous tits, you may also spot griffon vultures and hawks hovering around the crags.

The road finally arrives in Asigonía's broad *platía* – ringed by **busts** portraying Venizélou and associated village heroes, but curiously not its most celebrated recent son, **George Psychoundákis** (see p.337 & p.459), who died in 2006 aged 85. Psychoundákis's story of perilous wartime treks over the mountains delivering messages to the various intelligence outposts has now become part of island legend. It has to be said, though, that his status on his home turf lags far behind his international fame and, when his name is brought up, it is often pointed out that many did equally and more dangerous work in the resistance, but received few accolades for their efforts.

From the square, the **main street** climbs uphill between simple stone dwellings, their yards piled with the firewood needed to stave off the bitterly cold winters here. Many of the men still wear the traditional *saríki* black headdress, baggy *vraka* trousers and high boots, and almost all still dress in black. The bars overlooking the square and along the main street – usually the haunt of taciturn card-playing farmers and shepherds at the end of the working day – are welcoming, although there are no places offering food or accommodation. With an economy firmly based on stockbreeding, it's hardly surprising that the village's most important **festival** (on April 23) involves flocks of sheep being brought at dawn to the church to be milked, sheared and dedicated to Áyios Yeóryios, their patron saint and protector. Village women then boil the milk on the spot and offer steaming cups of it to festival-goers.

The road south from Asigonía (now asphalted all the way to Imbros) forms part of the E4 Pan-European walking route. If you want a decent **hike**, from just before the hamlet of **Kallikrátis**, 10km south of Asigonía, a track heads east for 8km to Miriokéfala (see opposite). From here it's possible to return to Asigonía by way of Marouloú (5km) or to continue 7km north to Argiroúpolis along an asphalt road. The slightly longer 27km trek from Asigonía to Imbros along the route of the E4 has been rendered less attractive to walkers now that it is completely asphalted; in your own vehicle, of course, it's a great drive.

East of Réthimnon: the coast road

Leaving Réthimnon to the east, you can strike almost immediately onto the **coast road**, which runs fast, flat and dull along the coastal plain, or follow the old road, squeezed into the narrow gap between this and the sea. On the latter route you'll pass through a string of village suburbs, connected now by an almost continuous string of hotel development for some 10km. At **Stavroménos** the old road cuts under the highway and heads inland; the new road continues to hug a featureless coastline dotted with rocky beaches, stands of reeds and piecemeal development, plus the odd luxury hotel. A little further east along the coast, the cheerful resorts of **Pánormos** and **Balí** are both welcoming places to rest up for a while, but the latter can get a bit overcrowded in high season.

Pánormos

Pánormos, 22km east of Réthimnon, marks a distinct break in topography: to the west is a long stretch of level coastline, to the east a spectacular, swooping mountain drive on the E75 highway which continues virtually all the way to Iráklion. Here, too, are the last of the large hotels for some time, curving round a headland above a small bay and beach.

The tiny village of Pánormos is just a short detour off the road, a pretty little place with a couple of bars and tavernas perched above the harbour and a small **sandy beach**. Happily, and unlike its neighbour Balí, it does not attract big crowds even in high season and as a result holds on to its appealing tranquillity. Surprisingly, this is also an ancient settlement (a minuscule river runs through to the sea) with the ruins of what was once a large sixth-century **basilica**, probably destroyed in the ninth-century Saracen invasion, and of a later **Genoese castle**. There are also quite a few new **rooms** places as well as a large luxury hotel, the *Club Marine Palace* (Ⓣ28340 51610, Ⓦwww.grecohotel.gr; ⑨), so the beach sometimes fills up in midsummer, but there's usually space to breathe. In the village proper, *Lucy's Pension* (Ⓣ28340 51328, Ⓦwww.lucy.gr; ③) has sea-view balcony studio rooms with kitchenette as well as some attractive apartments near the harbour sleeping up to three (⑤). The same proprietor operates the nearby *Villa Andrea*, a newly constructed luxury villa with sea views and pool sleeping up to eleven (€335 per night in high season). Also on the harbour, *Captain's House* (Ⓣ28340 51352, Ⓦwww.captainshouse.gr; ③) has air-conditioned en-suite balcony rooms with TV and fridge and fully equipped apartments sleeping up to six (⑤–⑥). For **food** the harbour is also the place to head for, and *Sofoklis* is perhaps the best of the resort's tavernas (their grilled mussels and *sfakiano* casserole featuring lamb cooked in wine are recommended) with the neighbouring *Captain's House Taverna* and, around the small bay, *Agkyra* other possibilities for fresh fish.

Boat trips from the harbour go for day excursions to caves along the coast as well as to nearby Balí. Tickets cost around €15 and are available from the *Captain's House Taverna*.

Balí and around

BALÍ is a small resort set around a series of little coves, 9km east of Pánormos. Here the road descends briefly from the heights to a desolate patch of low ground behind a bay, occupied by a large garage (where the bus will drop you). Opposite the garage, a road runs around the bay towards the village; on foot, this is further than it looks – a couple of kilometres to the village, more to the best beach. What you see first, though, is a fair-sized pebbly beach at the end of the bay which often shelters a collection of camper vans and tents. Sadly, although the beaches are still spectacular, they're very much overrun, and Balí has become a package resort too popular for its own good. Only well out of season, when there are bound to be bargains given the number of rooms here, is it worth staying.

Balí proper consists of three **coves**. The first has a pebbly beach and a couple of tavernas and rooms places: here, too, is the *Bali Beach Hotel* (Ⓣ28340 94210, Ⓦwww.balibeach.gr; ⑥ with breakfast), the first and much the most luxurious hotel. With two pools and air-conditioned, sea-view, balcony rooms with TV and fridge, it's still quite a bargain. In the second cove is the original **village**, with most of the local stores as well as more hotels, rooms and tavernas. Here you could try *Mira Mare* (Ⓣ28340 94256, Ⓦwww.goldenmemories-crete.com; ③), which has excellent-value air-conditioned, en-suite, sea-view balcony rooms with fridge as well as three villas (⑧) nearby with pool, barbecue and balcony sea-views sleeping up to six. One side of this cove has been concreted to form a **harbour** (there are day-trips by boat from Réthimnon), and on the other you can swim, though rarely with much space. A couple of **tavernas** here are worth a try: *Valentino* and the slightly cheaper *Panorama*, with a pleasant terrace overlooking the harbour. Just behind the harbour the PADI-certificated Hippocampos (Ⓣ28340 94193, Ⓦwww.hippocampos.com.gr) offers **scuba diving courses** for beginners and experienced divers starting at €50 for a trial dive. Almost opposite here **Internet** access is available at *Bali Netcafe*. Also on the harbour, Captain Lefteris Cruises does catamaran and glass-bottom **boat cruises** along the coast starting at €25 for a day trip; he also rents (outboard) motor boats, canoes, pedalos, jet-skis and offers parasailing “flights” for €40 per go.

The third cove is known as **Paradise Beach**, and though it’s still much the best for swimming – with a patch of sand and, on either side, crags of rock with level places to sunbathe – it’s too crowded and overlooked to deserve the name any more. Two shady **tavernas** just above the beach make reasonable lunch stops, however, and there are a couple of rooms places, including the swish *Hotel Nostos* (Ⓣ & Ⓕ28340 94310, Ⓔnostosbali@axon.gr; ⑤), where air-conditioned rooms have good sea views and kitchenettes but no TV. If you stay overnight you could have Paradise Beach all to yourself in the early-morning sun, when you may be able to appreciate why it got its name. Slightly outside the cove, but still well sheltered within the larger bay, are a couple of rocks to dive from. It’s a beautiful place to splash about, surrounded by mountains. Behind this beach, Elpis (Ⓣ28340 94444) hires out cars and scooters for rentals of three days or more.

A good viewpoint to appreciate Balí’s setting, and a more peaceful place to break your journey, is the tiny part-ruined, part-restored seventeenth-century **Monastery of Áyios Ioánnis** (Sat–Thurs 9am–noon & 6–8pm), reached by a good road (following a potentially dangerous exit from the E75) to the north of the coast road,

Save the turtle

This stretch of coast is one of the main breeding areas of the **loggerhead sea turtle**, now on the list of endangered species. Until recently turtles were common throughout the Mediterranean, but the demands placed on the environment by both tourism and industry have led to many of their breeding habitats being developed or polluted. A sea-going creature for most of its life, the turtle must return to a beach – always the same one – in order to lay its eggs, and the stretch of coastline between the city of Réthimnon and Skaléta is now the second largest nesting area for loggerheads in the Mediterranean. Once these beaches are developed, the turtles, governed by powerful homing instincts, are unable to relocate to another and will die infertile. Unfortunately, nesting also occurs from early June to the end of August, coinciding with the high point of the tourist season. Once the female has buried her eighty to a hundred eggs on a nocturnal visit to the beach, the eggs must then remain undisturbed for a period of two months, before the hatchlings emerge to head for the sea. But even should they avoid being skewered by a beach umbrella or crushed by the feet of bathers – both common hazards – further dangers lie ahead for the newborn turtles. When they emerge, many of them, instead of heading for the sea, guided by the brightness of the horizon, are instead lured inland by artificial lights from hotel and tourist developments, and perish from exhaustion or dehydration. Emblematic of Crete’s and Greece’s problem of balancing tourist development and the needs of the environment, it remains to be seen whether the loggerhead turtle will avoid the fate of the dodo.

For **information** on programmes to protect the turtle, making donations or becoming a volunteer, contact the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, PO Box 30, 74100 Réthimnon (Ⓣ28310 72288, Ⓦwww.archelon.gr).

about five minutes west of the resort by car. The monastery church has some fragmentary seventeenth-century frescoes and there's a serene garden fronting the monks' cells (only one monk now remains), but its reputation among Cretans today is for its energetic role in the struggle against Turkish rule, for which it was bombarded in 1866 by the Turkish navy.

East of Balí, the next access to the coast is at Ayía Pelayía (see p.115), 25km further on. Nor is there much else to stop for: **Síses**, 12km east of Balí, has wonderful views from its perch beside the highway and a few rooms, but little else. From Síses village a badly rutted track cuts up to the old road. Don't be deceived by maps which show some kind of way through above Balí – there is no other practicable route inland between Pánormos (from where there's a good road to Pérama) and Fódhele.

The foothills of the Psiloritís

Taking the old roads east from Réthimnon, inland through the **foothills of the Psiloritís** range, there are a variety of routes and a number of interesting detours. The old main road, through Dhamásta, has least to offer, though it's a pretty enough drive. Striking higher into the mountains is more rewarding. For a combination of relatively easy driving and interest, the best option is the road up through Garázo and Axós to **Anóyia**, though you can also reach Axós on the even higher, stunningly scenic road from **Pérama**. Possible detours along the way include the scenically sited archeological site of **Arhéa Eléftherna**, and the remarkable caves of **Melidhóni** and **Sendóni**. The route concludes at the village of Anóyia, famed for its textiles and a gateway to the summit of Psiloritís.

Margarítes

Whichever route you follow, you'll leave the coast at Stavroménos – where a Minoan cemetery has recently been discovered behind the *Astrid Hotel* – and head up through Viranepiskopí. The first potential detour comes some 5km further on, a right turn for 4km to **Margarítes**. With a long tradition of pottery manufacture, the village is scattered with workshops, and you can buy the results in many outlets along the steep main street. While most of the output is fairly unsophisticated, one of the best places is the workshop of Níkos Kavgalákis on the village's southern edge. Jovial Níkos not only turns out a variety of pots, but also the enormous Ali Baba jars, or *píthoi*, similar to those found in the Minoan palaces and still used throughout agricultural Crete today. Of the places scattered around and along the main street Kerameíon, the workshop of Yiorgos Dalamvelas is perhaps the most authentic. Yiorgos creates his pots in the traditional manner using grey clay collected from the surrounding hills which is so fine it gives a glaze-like finish with a single firing. His fascinating pots the "cup of justice" and an intriguing salt-shaker are based on Minoan and Byzantine originals. Other potters' workshops to look out for are those of Manolis Syragopoulos and Konstantinos Gallios.

On the village's attractive **upper platía**, the shady terrace of the main **bar** overlooks the Margerítsanos valley, and is a good place to relax. A new **exhibition centre**, behind the square, stages exhibitions of pottery by local, Cretan and mainland potters.

For **places to stay**, the most pleasant option is the new *Taverna I Velanidia* (☎28340 92520; ③), with air-conditioned, en-suite balcony rooms with fridge and TV above a taverna. It lies almost opposite the workshop of Níkos Kavgalákis (see above). Among the cafés near the centre of the village *Taverna Gianousakis*

(Ⓣ288340 92255; ①) offers economical rooms with bath. Another possibility is *Irini Rooms* (Ⓣ28340 92494, ⓔspmik39@yahoo.com; ②), with good-value en-suite rooms and a fully equipped apartment (for the same price) at the bottom of the village, off the lower *platía*; the proprietor's house (signed) is at the top of the village close to Níkos Kavgalákis's workshop.

Arhéa Eléftherna and Eléftherna

Beyond Margarítes, the road climbs for 4km to the village of **ARHÉA ELÉFTHERNA** where, opposite a fountain, a paved way on the right leads after 200m to a parking place by the *Acropolis Taverna*, a good lunch stop. The taverna is perched on the edge of an archeological site dominated by the spectacular acropolis of ancient Eléftherna. The city that stood here in ancient times was one of the most important of eighth- and seventh-century BC Dorian Crete. When the Romans came in search of conquest in 67 BC it put up a stiff resistance, and later flourished as the seat of a Christian bishop. The Saracen invasions finished it off, however, and only recently has excavation of the site recommenced (by the University of Crete) after British archeologists packed up and left in 1929.

Beyond the taverna the path leads across a stretch of level rock, part of the original approach, carved in ancient times to resemble paving stones. Imposingly situated on a high promontory between two watercourses, the **acropolis** proper lies beyond a hefty *pírgos* or **tower** (which in large part still stands). Soon after this, follow a path which descends to the left to reach the remarkable **Roman cisterns** carved into the hill's west side, where enormous supporting pillars of solid rock support a vast cavernous interior. Nearby are the remains of the aqueduct which fed them. Proceeding north along a path which climbs back to the acropolis, you will find significant fragments of massive walls and ancient buildings – not always easy to make sense of – and the roofless ruined church of **Ayía Ánna**, still revered as a shrine by locals who come to light candles here. Almost certainly located on the site of an earlier church, the tiny shrine still retains some poignant fresco fragments, sadly exposed to the elements, as well as a couple of ancient altars, once witnesses to pagan sacrifices but now with a Christian function. More remains lie still further north on the acropolis's tip where, by looking east into the valley, you can see the remarkable **new excavations** of the ancient town below.

Directly beneath the northern edge of the acropolis in Eléftherna's recently excavated **necropolis** on the valley floor, archeologists made a potentially very significant discovery: traces of a **human sacrifice** made in front of the funeral pyre of some local magnate. It apparently dates from the late eighth century BC, about the same time that Homer was describing very similar sacrifices of Trojan prisoners in front of the funeral pyre of Achilles. The victim, who was bound hand and foot before ritually having his throat cut, may well have been expected to serve the dead man in the next world: also found in front of the pyre were sacrificed animals and offerings of perfume and food. Other cremations on the site (some twenty have been found, though only one human sacrifice) had offerings including gold, jewellery and fine pottery, as well as four tiny, superbly crafted **ivory heads** which are among the best work of their time (ca.600 BC) yet discovered anywhere. These and other finds from the necropolis are displayed in the archeological museum at Réthimnon.

The new excavations and the Hellenistic bridge

The new excavations below the acropolis to the east have uncovered a significant part of Hellenistic and Roman Eléftherna. Although there's a **path** down from the necropolis, the way isn't always clear and necessitates scrambling through the olive groves. For more convenient access, return to the turn-off before the *Acropolis Taverna* and backtrack slightly in the direction of Margarítes in order to take a road signed "Archeological Site" on the left just before the tenth-century Byzantine chapel of **Ayía Anna & Christos Soter**. Incidentally, this beautiful little church, dominated by a massive cypress tree, is worth a look: inside there's a fine twelfth-century *Pantokrátor* in the dome, the only surviving **fresco** of what must once have been a glorious painted interior. Following the dirt road to the archeological excavations, keep ahead downhill until you come to a white cabin used by the site's guardian. You should leave any transport here; the site is a short distance ahead. Unfortunately, plans to open the site to the public – complete with a museum to display the finds – have stalled, and at the time of writing the whole area has been securely fenced off, forcing you to peer through wire mesh to get a glimpse of the excavations. Many dwellings and a number of fine **Roman villas** with well-preserved mosaics fragments are already visible. One of these has a curious "garden seat" covered with mosaic decoration, and between the houses run paved streets complete with drains and sewers, and dotted with numerous altars. The excavations will continue in the coming years and this is set to become a site of major importance.

A remarkable stone-built **Hellenistic bridge** lies in the valley below the acropolis. With your own transport you should head 2km west to Arhéa Eléftherna's twin village, **Eléftherna**, which has a delightful **place to stay** – *Villa Antigone* (☎28340 23517; ③), at the northern end of the village, with roomy studios with kitchen and balcony spaced around a pool with great views; they'll even give reductions for stays of more than one night. A track on the right at the edge of the village as you enter (signed "Ancient Eléftherna") will bring you eventually to the bridge. Once on the track (which is drivable) keep going downhill, taking the left fork as it descends into the valley. Follow this track, soon passing a parking area which is being made ready for visitors, to a new excavation area visible behind a fence across the valley, for a good kilometre. You will eventually descend to the valley floor and the track soon climbs out of the valley on the opposite flank. It winds to another fork, where you again keep left; the bridge – about 150m beyond this – lies in the river valley (often dry in summer) to the left of the road. It is not signed and, when there is dense foliage on the trees, easy to miss. When you do reach it, however, the effort is worthwhile, for the bridge, standing five metres high and three deep and employing a **vaulted arch**, is almost perfectly intact, still capable of carrying traffic across the river. Beneath the arch is a washing and bathing place cut into the rock, and it is likely that this, too, is of a similar date. A **chapel** in the cliff above is built into a cave and may well occupy the site of an ancient shrine.

There's a practicable **walk** along a section of the E4 Pan-European footpath from Eléftherna to the monastery of **Arkádhi** (see p.248), less than 5km southwest as the crow flies; you can pick up the route on the western edge of the village, and it is marked on the Harms-Verlag map (see p.65). There is also an asphalted road to the monastery from Eléftherna.

From Pérama to Axós

Pérama is a substantial agricultural centre which also has a little light industry and a businesslike main street lined with banks, stores and cafés. Its chief interest is in the rarity value of seeing a Cretan town of such size that owes nothing whatever to tourism. Even if you do no more than drive through it's a refreshing sight, and you may well find yourself passing this way more than once if you take one of the local detours available.

The Melidhóni Cave

The most obvious detour in these parts is to **Melidhóni**, 5km northeast of Pérama. The village itself is unremarkable, but a thirty-minute walk (or a short drive, signed from the village) leads to the **Melidhóni Cave** (April–Nov daily 9am–7pm; €3 including free map; under-12s free), one of the most impressive on the island. The awesome central chamber is a geological cathedral thick with gigantic stalactites, stalagmites and bunches of mighty "organ pipes" soaring between petrified "draperies", spectacular curtain-like folds formed by the calcium deposits.

In mythology this was the legendary home of **Talos**, a bronze giant who protected the coasts of Crete by striding around the island hurling rocks at unfriendly ships; the Argonauts were greeted thus when they approached. Excavations in the cave have shown that it was inhabited during the Neolithic period and later was an important shrine for the **Minoans**, who may have worshipped their fertility goddess Eileíthyia here. The Greeks and Romans transformed it into a shrine to the god **Hermes Tallaios**, evidenced by thousands of inscriptions etched into the walls of one of the cave's inner chambers (not on view).

The Melidhóni Cave was also the setting for one of the most horrific **atrocities** in the struggle for Cretan independence. Here, in 1824, around three hundred local villagers took refuge, as they had often done before at time of war, in the face of an advancing army. This time, however, the Muslim commander demanded that they come out. When the Cretans refused, and shot two messengers sent to offer safe conduct, he tried to force them out by blocking the mouth of the cave with stones and cutting off the air supply. After several days of this, with the defenders opening new air passages every night, the troops changed their tactics, piling combustible materials in front of the cave and setting light to them; everyone inside was asphyxiated. The bodies were left where they lay for the cave to become their tomb, and ten years later Robert Pashley became one of the first to enter since the tragedy, to find in places "the bones and skulls of the poor Christians so thickly scattered, that it is almost impossible to avoid crushing them as we pick our steps along". This grisly event was far from unique: numerous other caves around the island have similar histories, although none claimed so many victims. A **shrine** near the entrance to the cave today commemorates the dead. Next to the ticket office there's also a small **café**, run with diner-style efficiency and banter by a friendly Greek family who previously lived in the United States.

Axós and around

Back through Pérama, the main road wends along the valley of the Yeropótamos all the way to the turning for the small village of **Garázo**. The simple roadside cafés here are friendly and exceptionally good value, although few people seem to stop here. Three kilometres beyond the village a signed turn-off leads 1km to the peaceful **Moní Dioskoúri**. A charming monastic retreat with neatly ordered cells circling the tiny Venetian church of Áyios Yeóryios, this is a particularly serene place in the early evening when the monks fill the place with singing, and incense from the church wafts around the small courtyard.

Four kilometres further on, **Axós** makes a surprisingly hectic contrast to Garázo – especially if you arrive at lunchtime. The main road through the village is lined with mostly rather poor weaving and embroidery for sale and with tavernas crowded with tourists. This is largely because the village serves as a lunch-stop for "Photo-Safari" day-trips from Iráklion and Réthimnon. If you catch it without the crowds, Axós is undeniably attractive; the small church of **Ayía Iríni** (if it's locked, try ringing the priest on ☎28340 61311) dates from the fourteenth century and contains significant, if damaged, frescoes. The site of a **post-Minoan settlement** (signed from the centre "Ancient Axós"), also called Axós, is barely accessible on a ridge above the village, with not much above ground to see should you reach it.

The alternative upper road from Pérama arrives in Axós by the church, first passing through **Livádhia** and **Zonianá**, two rather tumbledown, straggly but atmospheric villages, as traditional as any you'll find in Crete. Should you pass through either in the early evening at weekends, you're likely to find what seems to be the entire population out in the streets, the elders in traditional dress and the young keen for a chance to try out their English. Just beyond Zonianá, 500m up a side road on the village's eastern edge, you have the chance to visit the **Sendóni Cave** (daily: April–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–March 10am–4pm; Ⓦwww.zoniana.gr; guided visits €4), with a magnificent display of stalactites, stalagmites and petrified waves, many over five million years old. Enthusiatic and knowledgeable guides conduct you through a vast tunnel-like cavern, fitted with a series of walkways extending some 500m or so into a spur of Mount Ida. Local legend has it that the cave was discovered by an eight-year-old girl who, lured away by fairies, was later found dead in its darkest recesses. The entrance fee is intended to finance the construction of more walkways to penetrate still deeper into the cave, which is known to extend at least another kilometre beyond what is already on view. This will also allow the somewhat spooky pleasure of viewing some miniature bats which are known to breed there.

Anóyia

The road from Pérama heads through Axós to **ANÓYIA**, a small town perched beneath the highest peaks of the Psiloritís range. It is the obvious place from which to approach the **Idean Cave** and, for the committed, the **summit of Psilorítis** itself. The weather, refreshingly cool when the summer heat lower down is becoming oppressive, is one good reason to come, but most people are drawn by the proximity of the mountains or by a reputation for some of the best woven and embroidered **handicrafts** in Crete. The last is greatly exaggerated but the town still makes a very pleasant break from the coast. It's a prosperous place, with many pricey bars along the main street, something not usually seen this far from the coastal strip. The source of all this wealth is stockbreeding; the sheep farmers here are some of the richest in Greece.

The Town

As you drive through, it seems that Anóyia has two quite distinct halves: from what appears to be the older, **lower town**, the road takes a broad loop around, to re-emerge near the modern-looking Platía Meídani of the **upper town**. In many ways this appearance is deceptive. A series of steep, sometimes stepped alleys connect the two directly, and however traditional the buildings may look, closer inspection shows that most are actually concrete. This reflects a tragic recent history – the village was one of those destroyed in 1944 as reprisal for the abduction of General Kreipe (see p.427), and at the same time all the men who could be rounded up here were summarily executed. The local handicrafts tradition is in part a reflection of this history, both a conscious attempt to revive the town and the result of bitter necessity, with so large a proportion of the local men killed. At any rate it seems to have worked, and large numbers of these surviving elderly widows (accompanied now by their daughters) are anxious to subject any passing visitor to their terrifyingly aggressive sales techniques.

The impression of an old and a new town persists even when you know it to be false. The upper half of the village has almost all the **accommodation** options as well as the bank (no foreign exchange) and post office, police, most of the non-

△ Anóyia market stall

tourist stores and the large **Platía Meídani**, lined with bars where the younger residents hang out. Walk the lanes between the two halves of town and there's a real country atmosphere: empty houses and garages closed up with wire and used to stable livestock; goats and pigs grazing in vacant lots; and more workshop/homes where the craftswomen have set up showrooms in their front parlours.

The more antique feel of the lower town is reinforced by the elderly men, baggy trousers tucked into their black boots, moustaches bristling, who sit at the *kafenía* tables on the focal **Platía Livádhi**, and by the black-clad women sitting outside their textile stores nearby. The intriguing **sculptures** flanking a statue in this square – a wooden carving of Venizélos, arm in a sling with a curious bird sculpture dangling from the tree overhead – are the work of revered local sculptor Algiliadi Skoulas, who died in 1996. Yéorgos Skoulas has opened a **museum** (daily 9am–7pm; free) dedicated to his father, reached by turning right behind the Venizélos statue and continuing along the line of textile shops to turn left uphill; the museum is on the right. The exhibits are a collection of Skoulas senior's bizarre sculptures and paintings, whose naive simplicity his son will explain with enthusiasm. Skoulas junior often treats visitors to a performance on the *lyra* – on which he's a deft exponent – and he may even throw in a *mantináda* vocal. There's not a great deal else in the way of sights, although enthusiasts may wish to visit the fourteenth-century church of **Áyios Ioánnis** on the main street, which has some well-preserved wall paintings.

Anóyia is a noted centre of **lyra music** – many of the greatest performers on the instrument have come from here. Among them, the late Níkos Xylouris was a shepherd who made his own *lyra* and taught himself to play, and whose performances and compositions turned him into a Cretan legend in the 1960s and 1970s. The house where he was born is now *Kafenion Xylouris*, on the lower square, although little is served here but *raki* and house wine. His brother, Psarantonis, is also a great talent and continues to live in the town.

Practicalities

Anóyia sees a lot of day-trippers, but most stay only an hour or so. Linger a while, or stay overnight, and it's surprisingly uncommercial. It shouldn't normally be hard to find a **room** in the upper half of town, where signs lead off all along the main street. A couple of the best places are on Odhós Pándidoni, the road that swings left (east) from the lower square. About 500m along the road as it climbs you'll come to the pleasant flower-bedecked *Rooms Aris* (ⓣ28340 31817, ⓕ28430 31058; ③) with balcony en-suite rooms with fridge, quickly followed by the friendly *Hotel Aristea* (ⓣ28340 31459; ② with breakfast), which has en-suite rooms with TV and sensational balcony views. There are more rooms places along Kendriko Dhrómos, the upper town's main street, such as *Rooms Kriti* (ⓣ28340 31048; ②), but the location is not as attractive.

There are a number of **tavernas** along the main street. Wherever you eat, ask to sample the delicious local **cheese**. In the lower village you're best off going to the grill places on the square, where the choice will most likely be limited to whatever happens to be on the spit (usually succulent lamb). In the upper village close to *Rooms Kriti* (see above), *Aetos* is a popular local taverna with a grill out front and specializing in lamb and goat. If you can face the climb to the top of the main street, *Taverna Skalomata* – on the road out to Mount Psilorítis and the Idean Cave – has a fantastic view from its terrace and serves more excellent barbecued lamb. Over the road from here *Infocost@* is Anóyia's solitary **Internet** café. If you're looking for an original souvenir you might want to check out Tarrha Glass, a small **glass factory** at the top of the town (on the road out to the Nídha plateau), which has stylish but pricey glass ornaments and vases made on the premises. The proprietor's fully restored sky-blue 1968 Triumph Herald convertible usually stands outside, making it easy to locate.

Mount Psilorítis and its caves

Heading for the mountains, a smooth road swiftly ascends the 21km from Anóyia to an altitude of 1400m, to reach the **Nídha plateau** at the base of **Mount Psi-**

The memorial to peace

At the northern end of the Nídha plateau, German artist Karen Raeck has constructed a rock sculpture entitled *Immortal Freedom Fighter of Peace*, commemorating the suffering of the town of Anóyia at the hands of the German army in 1944 (see p.262). A one-woman reconciliation mission between her homeland and Anóyia, Raeck has spent most of the last 25 years living in the town and has gained the respect and trust of its inhabitants. The monument, measuring 30m by 9m, consists of a large number of huge boulders in an impressionistic image which, when viewed from the air, create a winged figure. The shepherds of the plateau assisted Raeck in carrying and positioning the stones, and during the work's assembly she lived in one of their stone huts. The sculpture is visible from the terrace of the *Taverna Nida*, where staff can tell you about it; an excursion to see it at close quarters makes for a very pleasant stroll across the plateau.

lorítis. It's a steady climb most of the way, and a road travelled little except by the shepherds who pasture their sheep up here (and who nowadays travel back and forth by pick-up). Along the way in late spring, as the snow recedes, you'll see myriad wildflowers and, at all times, quite a few birds, including vultures and magnificent golden eagles, a stirring image as they glide imperiously across their mountain domain. The *mitáta* or stone huts close to the roadside – many of them ruined – are former shepherds' dwellings where traditionally sheep's milk yoghurt and cheese would be made; many are now used as dog kennels and even chicken coops. Somewhere near the highest point a signed road leads off left for 3km to the **Skinakas Observatory**, sitting atop the peak of the same name. This is open to the public on certain Sundays throughout the summer – the dates should be posted on a board at the start of the road. A little further along, a track to the right goes to the **ski area**: an unlikely thought in summer, although it does see plenty of snow in season. Soon after, the small plateau and its bare summer pastures fan out below you, and the road – the last section unpaved – drops to skirt around its western edge.

The Idean Cave

At what is effectively the end of the road (shortly beyond, it peters out in a network of trails across the plateau) and overlooking the plain, stands a modern but very neglected **visitors' centre**. In one corner of this extensive building, now largely a derelict shell, *Taverna Nida* (☎28340 31141; April–Sept daily; rest of year Sat & Sun only) serves hearty **taverna** standards and has a couple of **rooms** (① including breakfast) sharing a bathroom. Stelios Stavrakakis, the friendly proprietor, is a fount of information on the plateau and can advise (in Greek) on the viability of walking routes in the mountains, as well as likely weather conditions.

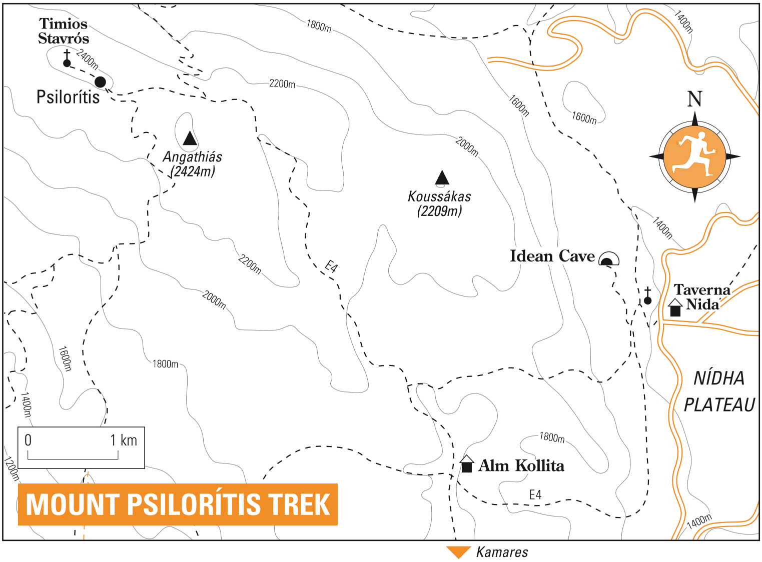
Opposite the taverna, a path (about a 15min walk) leads up to the celebrated **Idean Cave** (Idhéon Ándhron), a rival of that on Mount Dhíkti (see p.174) for the title of **Zeus's birthplace**. Although scholarly arguments rage over the exact identity of the caves in the legends of Zeus, and over the interpretation of the various versions of the legend, locals are in no doubt that the Idean Cave is the place where the god was brought up, suckled by wild animals. Certainly this hole in the mountainside, which as Cretan caves go is not especially large or impressive, was associated from the earliest of times with the cult of Zeus, and at times ranked among the most important centres of pilgrimage in the Greek world. Pythagoras visited the cave, Plato set *The Laws* as a dialogue along the pilgrimage route here, and the finds made within indicate offerings brought from all over the eastern

Mediterranean. Recent excavations have revealed that the cave cult had a much longer history than this, too. First signs of occupation go back as far as 3000 BC, and though it may then have been a mere place of shelter, by the Minoan era it was already established as a shrine, maintaining this role until about 500 AD.

The cave and the area around it are something of a disappointment when you finally get there, with more the feel of a mining operation than an important historical site. A major – and prolonged – **archeological dig** has now been completed, leaving a number of unattractive railway tracks in its wake. When you've descended the concrete steps into the depths, the cave turns out to be a fairly shallow affair, devoid of even natural wonders and certainly not a patch on the dramatic interior of the Dhiktean Cave.

To the summit of Mount Psilorítis

The *Taverna Nida* and visitors' centre also mark the start of the way (now forming a stretch of the E4 Pan-European footpath) to the summit of **Psilorítis** (Mount Ida) which, at 2456m, is the highest mountain in Crete. Though it's not for the unwary or unfit, the climb should present few problems to experienced, properly equipped hikers, and there are also **guided ascents** from Thrónos (see p.273). The route, which diverts from the path to the Idean Cave just beyond the small spring and chapel, is marked with red arrows in addition to the E4 waymarkers – a guide who knows the mountain would be useful, since it's not always obvious which is the main trail, but is by no means essential. The Petrákis *Crete Trekking and Road Map* for Réthimnon (see p.65) is the best trekker's **map** available for this area and clearly marks the routes described here. Don't attempt the ascent alone, however, as you could face a very long wait for help if you were to run into trouble. If you do make the climb, allow for a seven-to-eight-hour return trip to the chapel at the summit, though in spring thick snow may slow you down. Carry enough food, water and warm gear to be able to overnight in one of the shelters should the



MOUNT PSILORÍTIS TREK

weather turn; in any event a night at the top, with the whole island laid out in the sunset and sunrise, is a wonderful experience.

For the first thirty minutes or so **the climb** trails south across the mountainside, a gradual ascent until you reach a gully where it starts in earnest. Head west here, away from the plain, on a rocky path up the left-hand side of the gully. After about an hour and a quarter of this you reach an open height with a stone shelter and good views back the way you came. Don't follow the most obvious trail at this point, which leads only to one of the lesser peaks, Koussákas (2209m), but instead follow the ridge downhill and south, unlikely as this may look. After barely fifteen minutes at Alm Kollita you reach a basin where several trails meet, and where there is spring water and **stone huts** for shelter. The vertiginous trail south from here leads to Kamáres, some 7km distant (see below). You, however, should turn right (northwest) and an obvious uphill trail will eventually take you to a ridge skirting the north slope of Angathiás (2424m) and on all the way to the summit (on clear days the sea can be made out to the north). However, it is only in the last twenty minutes that the peak of Psiloritis itself becomes visible and the ground starts to fall away to reveal just how high you are.

The **summit** is marked by another shelter and the chapel of **Tímios Stavrós** ("Holy Cross" – a name by which the peak is sometimes known locally), inside which Níkos Kazantzákis famously claimed to have lost his virginity. Nearby there's water in a cistern, which you should boil or purify before drinking. On a (rare) clear day the spectacular **panoramas** from the summit – including the Lefká Óri (White Mountains) rising in the west and the Dhíkti massif to the east – make the climb well worthwhile.

Routes to and from Kamáres and Vorízia

There are any number of **alternate routes** up and down the mountain. From the west you can climb from virtually any of the Amári villages below the peak (most notably Fourfourás; see p.274), but although this is relatively straightforward in the sense that you can see the peak almost all the way, there are no real trails and you may run into difficulty with patches of thorny undergrowth or loose scree (although as this is now another stretch of the E4 Pan-European footpath it should be waymarked).

South of the mountain, Kamáres and Vorízia are possible trailheads. Descending from the summit, the trail down to Nídha divides in the basin mentioned in the account above. If you head south from the basin, a trail that is not hard to follow but is a good deal steeper and longer than anything outlined above takes about four hours down to **Kamáres**. About halfway, there's a junction with a trail to the huge **Kamáres Cave**, in which the first great cache of the elaborate pottery known as Kamáres ware was found (it's now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum). From the cave you either backtrack to this trail to continue to Kamáres village or carry on east to another trail, equally steep, which ends up in Vorízia, 4km west of Kamáres. Kamáres has both **rooms** and **food**: the misnamed *Hotel Psiloritis* (☎ 28920 43290; ①), with shared bath, is in fact a basic rooms place in the centre. The hotel has no sign: ask in the village for directions. There are a couple of tavernas, one at each end of the village, the best of which is *Taverna Bournelis*, close to the start of the steep Psilorítis trail at the village's western end. Kamáres has at least one **bus** a day to Míres.

If you're prepared to stay at the *Taverna Nida* (see p.265) or camp on the plateau (there's plenty of water but conditions can be very cold), another attractive option is to tackle the peak up and down in one day, and continue south next day from the Nídha plateau on a beautiful and relatively easy hike, four hours or so down to **Vorízia**, five or six to Kamáres. For either, track around to the southern edge of

The wildest cat in Crete

In Cretan myth and legend there have long been told tales of the *fourokattos* ("furious cat"), a centuries-old name which refers to a wildcat living in the mountains of the island. Although in 1905 two skins from such a beast were purchased at the market in Haniá by a British woman attached to a scientific mission, for most of the last century scientists regarded the existence of such a beast as unlikely. They also dismissed as fanciful the stories of shepherds and goatherds who claimed to have seen this wild cat.

Then, in 1996, an Italian university team studying the carnivores of the Cretan mountains were astonished when they returned to their traps one morning to find they had snared a five-and-a-half-kilo wildcat. The news created a sensation as the beast was taken to the University of Crete for study before being released back into the wild equipped with a radio tracking device. Tawny in colour and with small lynx-like tufts, the cat does not belong to the subspecies of cats on the mainland of Greece and the rest of Europe; its nearest relative is a species inhabiting North Africa and Sardinia. Scientists believe that it is an extremely reclusive and fully nocturnal animal, which explains why it is so rarely seen.

The cat's discovery has not only proven generations of Cretans to have been right, but has turned the zoological history of the island upside down. Recent research has produced evidence of more wildcats, but there are serious concerns for the future as its natural environment is encroached upon by development. Scientists are now puzzling over how the animal got to Crete in the first place – was the cat perhaps brought over as a domesticated beast by the ancestors of the Minoans, or has it been on Crete since the island became separated from the mainland – questions it is hoped will be answered by further investigation into the origins of this enigmatic creature.

the plateau, where a gully (which shortly after becomes a considerable ravine) leads off. Large red arrows direct you towards Kamáres on the trail that passes east of the Kamáres Cave. For Vorízia, follow the ravine for about an hour until a faint trail climbs out on the left (soon after this, the stream bed becomes impassable). Above the ravine there are fine views and a heady drop for another hour, when you must turn left (east) again. This is not obvious, but you should begin to see signs of life – goat trails and shepherds' huts. You cut past the top of a second, smaller ravine to a stone hut and then descend, zigzagging steeply, to a dirt road and Vorízia village, 4km east of Kamáres, where there is no food or accommodation.

Spíli and around

The pleasant country town of **SPÍLI**, tucked into the folds of the Mount Kédhros foothills 30km south of Réthimnon, is the trailhead for plenty of wild country **hikes**. The town doesn't look much as you drive through, though the mountainside which towers over the houses is impressive, but if you get off the main road, into the white-walled alleys which wind upwards towards the cliff, it can be very attractive. A sharp curve in the road marks the centre of town, by a small *platía* overlooked by lofty plane trees. Just above this there's a prodigious 25-spouted **fountain** constructed in the 1960s to replace an elegant Venetian fountain, which was removed to a less exalted position alongside the health centre (see opposite). Beyond the fountain begins a steep mosaic of flowered balconies, cobbled lanes, shady archways, giant urns and whitewashed chimneypots. Spíli can become quite crowded – many of the bus tours passing along the road make a brief stop here, usually for lunch – but between times and in the evenings it is quiet and rural. Stay overnight and you'll be woken early by the sounds of the farmyard and an agricultural community starting work.

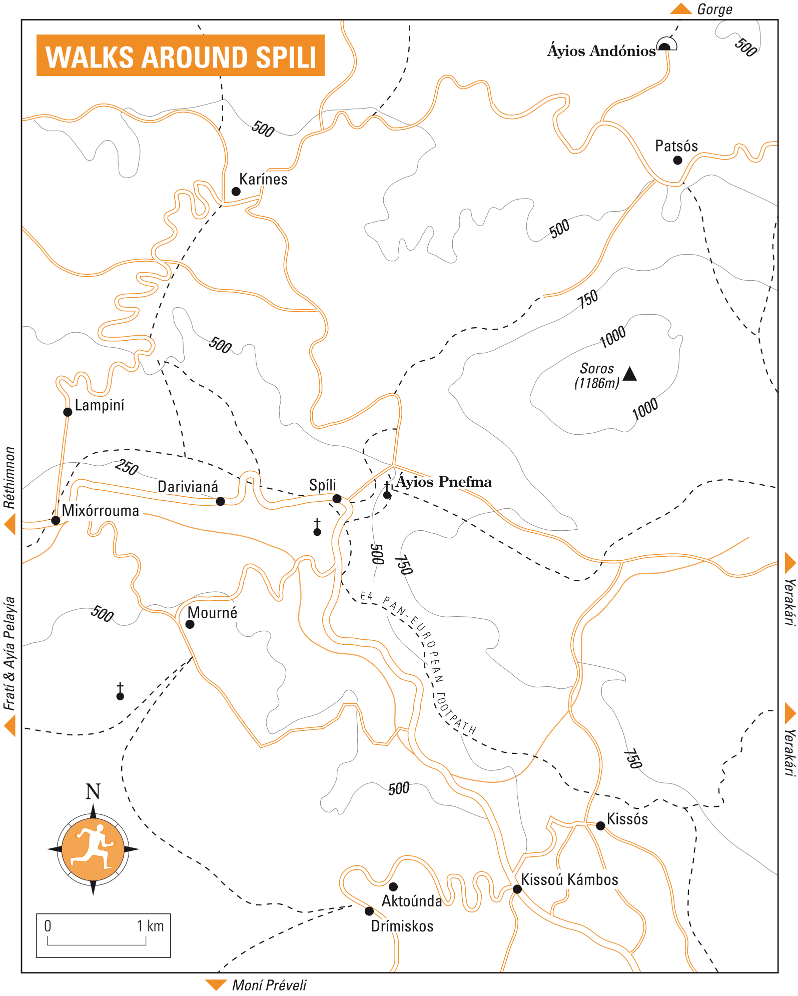
Numerous places spread out along the main road offer **rooms** – the flower-decked *Green Hotel* (Ⓣ28320 22225, Ⓦwww.greenhotel.gr; ③) at the north end of town is a possibility, although the air-conditioned rooms are rather drab. Just behind, however, is a delightful smaller pension, 🏃 *Heracles* (Ⓣ28320 22411, Ⓔheraclespapadakis@hotmail.com; ③, ten-percent reduction for *Rough Guide* readers), with spotless en-suite balcony rooms. The genial proprietor also rents out **mountain bikes**, is an authority on walking in the area, will exchange money and sells his own honey, jams, *raki* and olive oil. Just along the road from these two towards the centre of the village lies *Rooms Costas* (Ⓣ28320 22040, Ⓕ28320 23040; ④ including breakfast), another possibility for pleasant en-suite balcony rooms with TV.

Of the few **eating** places, *Taverna Stratidakis*, between the fountain and the *Green Hotel*, is a good bet, as is *Taverna Giannis* (50m beyond the fountain on the Ayía Galíni road). A right turn off the same road at the southern edge of the village leads to 🏃 *Taverna Panorama*, with great balcony views and a very good kitchen serving up traditional dishes such as *katsikaki krasatos* (kid in wine) and *hortopitakia* (vegetable pies). A worthwhile trip out of town for 6km along the mountain road to Yerakári brings you to the excellent 🏃 *Taverna Kambos*, another great place for traditional Cretan cooking where the *fava* (split pea purée), *païdhákia* (lamb chops) and *loukánika* (sausages) are outstanding. The pleasant *Café Babis*, over the road from the fountain, does good **breakfasts** (local yoghurt and honey are excellent) and evening drinks, and serves as one of the village's three **Internet** cafés; the others, *Milos* and *Fabrica*, lie across the road opposite the multi-spouted fountain. One surprising and attractive bar is *Rastoni*, on a hill at the north end of the village, which has a superb **pool** that is free to use (day and night) for the price of a drink. It lies on the edge of the village just off the new road to Yerakári, up a lane on the right. Almost everything else you're likely to need is clustered around the fountain square, including most of the local stores and businesses: there's a **post office** and **bank** (with ATM) on the main road, a souvenir/newspaper store on the corner near the fountain that sells foreign press, and cardphone kiosks along the main street.

Walks around Spíli

Plenty of challenging **hikes** start in Spíli. The one across to Yerakári in the Amári valley formerly seemed something of an achievement, but these days the new road linking the two places (spectacular drive though it is) undermines it somewhat. All the routes described below are marked in detail on the Petrákis *Réthimno* map (see p.65).

One **easy walk** through the hills surrounding Spíli and which can also be done in high summer starts out from Spíli's health centre, up a side road on the left 300m along the Ayía Galíni road. A path to the right just before the health centre leads 75m to the site of the Venetian fountain that once stood in Spíli's central *platía*. The walk starts by keeping ahead beyond the health centre to a T-junction. Cross the road and go through an improvised gate on the opposite side, then climb the steep rise following the red or green paint marks. You will eventually pass through a **gorge**, which opens out into a plain where there is an olive grove. Beyond the olive grove you'll meet a broad track; turn right along this, soon passing an old spring and picnic area followed by the ancient chapel of Áyios Pnefma. A kilome-


WALKS AROUND SPILI
Gorge
Áyios Andónios
500
Patsós
Karínes
500
500
750
1000
Soros (1186m)
1000
500
Lampiní
250
Dariviana
Spíli
Áyios Pnefma
Mixórrouma
Réthimnon
500
750
E4 PAN-EUROPEAN FOOTPATH
Mourné
500
Fratí & Ayía Pelayía
Yerakári
Yerakári
750
500
N
Kissós
Kissoú Kámbos
Aktoúnda
Drímiskos
0 1 km
Moní Préveli

tre or so further the track crosses a river (often dry in summer) and continues for about a kilometre to meet an asphalt road (the Spíli–Yerakári road). Turn left along this and, beyond a bend, take a track descending on the left. This will slowly bring you back into the upper part of Spíli and, descending along narrow lanes, return you to the central square. The walk is about 5km in total and shouldn't take more than two hours. In high summer, leaving the health centre around 6pm gives you ample time to complete the hike before dusk.

Another non-taxing four-kilometre hike (partly along the E4 Pan-European footpath) follows the main road west to the village of **Mixórrouma**, where you turn right on a road signed for Karínes. This brings you to the pretty village of **Lampiní** and its domed Byzantine **church of the Panayía**, sited above a valley northwest of Spíli. This was the scene of a terrible massacre in 1827 (marked by a plaque) when the Turks locked the congregation inside the church before setting fire to it. All perished, and only fragments of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century frescoes survived the blaze.

To extend this walk, you could continue 5km beyond Lampiní to **Karínes**, another attractive village with a friendly *kafenío* in the midst of gently terraced hills. A further 7km brings you to **Patsós**. A turn on the left 1km before Patsós leads for ten minutes to the **Áyios Andónios cave** and a beautiful gorge with trees and water to the north of the cave, which was a Minoan, and later Dorian and Roman, sanctuary. Thrónos (see p.272), 9km east of Patsós and reached via the hamlets of Pandánasa, Apóstoli and Kalóyeros, is a realistic end destination with the possibility of a bed and a meal (but phone ahead in high season to book).

South from Spíli, a walk encompassing **Mourné**, **Fratí** and **Ayía Pelayía** takes in some superb scenery with views of the Psilorítis and Lefká Óri ranges besides four ancient **churches** (with fine frescoes at the last one), and offers opportunities for birdspotting. Take the road from Spíli to Mourné, beyond which a track – along which you'll see the churches – heads southwest in the direction of Fratí, approached by a stiff descent. From here there's an easy route above the Kissanos river valley to Ayía Pelayía and the main road back to Spíli. The whole circular 10km route takes about four hours in total.

Another fine trail leads 15km southwest from Spíli to **Moní Préveli** (see p.287). Take the road west to Mourné and then follow a track heading south. After about 3km and just before **Drímiskos**, follow a cross-track heading west towards the Megapótamos river. When you reach the river valley, head south to arrive at Palm Beach (see p.289). At the sea, turn right (west) to cross the river and keep ahead along a track to reach the monastery. To save yourself the return journey you could arrange to be picked up by taxi from here to take you back to Spíli; in advance this will cost about €15 and can be booked through the proprietor of the pension *Heracles* in Spíli, who can also answer queries relating to any of the above hikes.

South to Triopétra

Just over 1km southeast of Spíli, the main road to Ayía Galíni passes the gorge of Ayía Fotía on the left, a favourite nesting site for **eagles** – early morning and evening are the best times to see them. The route then follows a long valley between Mount Kédhros and the lesser summit of Sidhérotas to the west. There are few diversions along the way, but a turn-off at Akoúmia on a newly asphalted road leads after 10km to the coastal hamlet of **Triopétra**, a sleepy place with a good, expansive beach. If you wanted to hole up for a couple of days in a tranquil haven for a bit of reading, lounging and swimming, this is as good a place as any. Among the handful of tavernas with **rooms**, *Alexander Rent Rooms* (☎28320 32021, mobile ☎6972834950; ②) on the way in has en-suite rooms (some air conditioned) and, nearer the sea and up a slope on the right, *Yakindus* (mobile ☎6977077808; ②) offers modern air-conditioned studio rooms with sea-view balconies and kitchenette. Beyond a bluff at the east end of the beach, *Taverna-Pension Pavlos* (☎28310 25189, Ⓦwww.triopetra.com.gr; ②–③) has rooms plus some pleasant air-conditioned studios with kitchenette and balcony sea view; the taverna's fish is caught daily by the friendly and eponymous proprietor. More places for **food** include *Apothiki*, near to where the road hits the strand and, slightly further along, the equally good *To Girogiali* (mobile ☎6972302694; ③), with an attractive terrace. The latter has its own en-suite air-conditioned rooms with TV in a separate building behind.

The Amári valley

An alternative route south from Réthimnon, far less travelled than the road through Spíli, is the road which turns off south at Périvolia on the eastern fringe of town towards the **Amári valley**. Amári is one of those areas, like Sfakiá, which features prominently in almost everything written about Crete – especially in tales of **wartime resistance** – yet which is hardly explored at all by modern visitors. Shadowed by the vast profile of Psiloritis, its way of life survives barely altered by the changes of the last twenty or even fifty years. Throughout the valley, isolated hamlets subsist on the ubiquitous olive, with the occasional luxury of an orchard of cherries (especially around Yerakári), pears or figs, and throughout there are a startling number of richly frescoed **churches**. It's an environment conducive to slow exploration, with a climate noticeably cooler than the coast. In midsummer the trees, flowers and general greenery here make a stunning contrast to the rest of the island.

Three **buses** a day run from Réthimnon to **Thrónos** and **Amári**, the valley's main villages; onwards from either the service is sporadic or nonexistent. It's best to explore **on foot**, in which case a water bottle and the best map you can find are essential – the Petrákis *Réthimno* map (p.65) will do the job. For touring in your own vehicle, the main roads are fine and well maintained. Officially, there are **rooms** only in Thrónos, Amári, Yerakári and Kouroutes, but don't let this deter you from asking in other villages: locals are often only too happy to have a paying guest for a night or two, and traditional hospitality here has not yet been extinguished by abuse.

Whenever you come, but in July or August especially, you may be lucky enough to stumble on a village wedding (something not to be missed in Crete) or a **festival** in honour of the local saint, the harvest or some obscure historical event; the latter are worth going out of your way for, so keep an eye out for notices pasted in *kafenío* windows. Beginning in a distorted cacophony of overamplified Cretan music, *lyra* and *lauto* to the fore, the celebrations continue until the participants are sufficiently gorged on roast lamb and enlivened by wine to get down to the real business of **dancing**. Cretan dancing at an event such as this is an extraordinary display of athleticism and, as often as not, endurance – and if the party really takes off, locals will dig out their old guns and rattle off a few rounds into the sky to celebrate.

There are two roads through the Amári valley, one following the **eastern** side from the village of **Thrónos** and clinging to the flanks of the Psiloritis range, the other tracing the edge of the lesser Kédhros range on the **western** side. Both are scenically spectacular, but the eastern route probably has the edge in terms of beauty and places of interest.

Thrónos and the eastern side of the Amári valley

The first of the real Amári villages on the **eastern side** of the valley is **THRÓNOS**, situated just off the main road at the head of the valley on the site of ancient Sybritos, whose port was modern Áyia Galíni. Like so many others here, Thrónos seems lost in the past, with its beautifully frescoed **church of the Panayía** and majestic views across the valley and up to the mountains. There are more ancient remains, too. In the Byzantine era this was the seat of a bishop (hence *thrónos*, throne) and these early Christian days are recalled by the remains of a mosaic which is partly under the village church and spreads beyond its walls, with traces both inside and out. The later building, in fact, is only about a quarter of the size of the original church, whose floorplan, guarded by a low rail, can be clearly seen. The elderly keeper will usually appear with the key as soon as you start to take an interest in the church; if not, enquire at *Rooms Aravanes* (see below), who also have a key.

On the hill above the village are still-earlier remains of the **acropolis** of ancient Sybritos, easily reached by following a path signed on the left beyond the church. Founded as a settlement in the twelfth century BC in the troubled late Minoan period, the site seems to have been more a refuge (similar to those at Karfí and Présos in eastern Crete) from mainland invaders than a real town. Most of the remains visible today, however, date from the substantial Greco-Roman town that flourished from the fifth century BC into the early Byzantine period, when the modern resort of Ayía Galíni served as its port. During this period Sybritos was the seat of a diocese (possibly based on the larger basilica which preceded the church of the Panayía above) until the town was destroyed by the Saracens in the ninth century. Plenty of books on the settlement's history and archeological excavations are available for perusal at *Rooms Aravanes*. The hill is topped by a radio mast, and besides plenty of ancient ruins when you reach the summit, there are spectacular views in all directions.

If you want **to stay** in Thrónos, simply follow the crude "Rent Rooms" signs to 🏃 *Rooms Aravanes* (ⓣ28330 22760, ⓔthronosm@otenet.gr; ②), a welcoming bar-taverna whose terrace and balcony rooms have the best view in the village. The en-suite rooms are pleasant, there's a **taverna** on the ground floor and the stage of the garden terrace at the rear is periodically pressed into use for big *bouzoúki* get-togethers, with dozens of tables put out and fires lit for barbecuing; keep an eye out for the posters, as these are well worth attending. The only other place in the village offering **food** is a basic *kafepantopolíon* near the church. *Rooms Aravanes* also acts as agent for a beautifully restored **stone-built house** in the village where en-suite rooms (②) come with more spectacular balcony views. *Aravanes*'s owner, Lambros Papoutsakis, is a man of diverse talents: besides constructing *lyras*, he is quite a player too, and also organizes **herb-collecting rambles** in the mountains (on which he's an expert), and distils his own *raki*. The **raki distilling** season begins in October, when you can make visits to local stills to see the farmers brewing their potent firewater and can also try it out. The *Aravanes*'s small **shop** also sells mountain herbs collected by Lambros as well as homemade honey.

Hikes from Thrónos

The proprietor of *Rooms Aravanes* also conducts **guided treks** to the peak of Mount Psilorítis (see p.266). Although he does take groups up in the daytime, his preferred approach is during the full moons of June, July and August, which avoids the extreme summer temperatures. Phone in advance for details; it's not a difficult climb, but you'll need sturdy footwear and a sleeping bag. For these **night walks**, the group starts out by Landrover in the early evening to reach the start point on the mountain. After a meal cooked in the open and a short nap, the ascent begins in bright moonlight. The summit is reached at around dawn, and the sunrise is always spectacular: on clear days the mountain offers a breathtaking view of the whole island and its four seas spreading in all directions. On the route down the hike takes in a visit to a goatherd's *mitato* (stone mountain hut) where you see and sample delicious cheese made on the spot.

Other **hikes** from Thrónos include a relatively easy path leading north through the foothills in a couple of hours to the monastery of **Arkádhi** (see p.248). The first 3km are now along a newly asphalted road (the former track), and the walking route then heads off to the east of this to reach the monastery where you can pick up buses. It's worth checking directions at *Rooms Aravanes*, as more new roads are planned in this area. South from Thrónos is an extremely easy stroll on a paved road running back into the main valley via **Kalóyeros**. Fifteen minutes' walk beyond Kalóyeros, a narrow path on the left leads uphill to the small stone church of **Áyios Ioánnis Theológos**, whose fine but decayed frescoes date from 1347 – the church should be open. This walk can be extended into a two-hour trek back to Thrónos; a map detailing this is available from *Rooms Aravanes*.

Amári and around

Back on the main road, the **Moní Asomáton** is only 1km south of Thrónos. The buildings are Venetian, though the monastery itself is older; having survived centuries of resistance and revolution, it finally became an agricultural school in 1931. It's not open to the public, but no one seems to mind if you wander in and look over the lovely old buildings, with a weed-infested central courtyard containing a church, a ruined Venetian fountain and – at the rear – a prodigious plane tree.

Outside and beside a taverna, a line of fir and eucalyptus trees marks the beginning of the five-kilometre paved road to **Amári**, the chief village of the valley. This is another beautiful drive or manageable walk, although the second half climbs quite steeply up the hill of Samítos, which rises right in the middle of the valley. On the way you pass through two picturesque villages, **Monastiráki** and **Opsigiás**, but Amári itself outdoes them: it looks like nothing so much as a perfect Tuscan hill village: note the steeply sloping roofs to cope with the winter snows and the chimneys for wood fires. There's really nothing to do here – even the couple of *kafenío* on the central *platía* often close for a siesta in the afternoon – but there are scintillating views across to Psilorítis. For a bird's-eye view, climb the **Venetian clocktower** that dominates the narrow alleyways (the door is always open). It's not immediately obvious how to get here, but keep climbing and circling the hill until you reach the church; enter the churchyard through some wrought-iron gates and then climb a flight of steps behind to find the tower. Just outside the village, the church of **Ayía Ánna**, reached down a lane on the western edge opposite the police station, has some extremely faded **frescoes** – dating from 1225, they have a fair claim to being among the oldest on Crete.

One of Amári's *kafenía*, *Noukakis* (☎28330 22830; ①), on the main square, has some remarkably cheap **rooms** with shared bath and also does **meals**. When you've eaten or taken a coffee, you could also make a brief visit to the nearby church (key from the *kafení0*) with fragmentary frescoes or the village **museum** (9am–6pm; free) across the square, comprising a room filled with agricultural equipment and various other pots, pans, clothing and receptacles donated by the villagers. Otherwise, the village boasts an OTE and **post office**, and there's a daily **bus** to Réthimnon, currently running at 6.45am and 4pm.

Fourfourás

Continuing south, there are more lovely villages, with the peak of Psilorítis now almost directly above and the softer lines of Mount Kédhros behind the Samítos hill on the other side. Though you can begin the climb of Psilorítis from **Fourfourás**, 11km south of Thrónos, it's more often used as the trailhead of some arduous hikes to the lesser peaks. There is a friendly and excellent-value **taverna** and **rooms** place here on the way in coming from Amári: *Windy Place* (☎28330 41366; ①) serves up hearty meals whilst its decent rooms – located in another building in the village proper – come with bath and heating. Its proprietors will also describe a **short cut** to the Psiloritís peak which allows you to take your car a good way up the mountain along a track which ascends to the right, 5km north of Fourfourás and 2km beyond the village of Plataánia. With care you can take a vehicle to the tree line (about 1hr), from where it's about a three-hour trek to the chapel of Tímios Stavrós on the summit. The walk down takes about two hours, from when you'll have another hour's drive back to the road. The same proprietor can also advise on a 15km gorge walk along the Plátis river valley to Ayía Galíni and will collect you from there to return you to Fourfourás.

Kourites, Níthavris and around

The next village, 6km south of Fourfourás, is **Kourites**, which although a fairly uneventful hamlet, does have an excellent **place to stay**, *Studios Kourites* (☎28330 41305, mobile ☎697285144; ②), signed off the road through. Here new balcony rooms come with kitchenette, TV and fans in a detached house surrounded by a garden. Some larger apartments are also available sleeping up to four (③). At **Níthavris**, 4km south of Kourites, the road divides. It's worth taking the road south towards Ayía Galíni for 3km to the village of **Apodhoúlou**, which has a number of interesting sights. On the way into the village there's a Late Minoan **passage tomb** signed on the left with its lintel still intact. Beyond here also on the left, just downhill from a bar and across the road from an old fountain, lies an interesting partly ruined mansion known as the **House of Kalítsa Psaráki**. It gets its name from the daughter of a local official who, in the 1821 rising against Turkish rule, was abducted by Muslims and sent to the slave market at Alexandria in Egypt. By chance she was seen there by Robert Hay, an English gentleman traveller, who secured her freedom and asked her to marry him. The couple returned to Crete, where an overjoyed family built this once impressive house for them to live in. Now a crumbling pile, it's nevertheless possible to see evidence of former grandeur, and the stone lintel of a window facing the road bears both Hay's initials and the date of 1846, when the house was completed. The present proprietor is trying to restore the edifice with his own meagre resources, and is usually happy to show you around.

From the centre of the village, signs indicate the church of **Áyios Yeóryios** and a **Minoan site** down a road on the right. The church, currently undergoing restoration, which lies about 1km down this lane, to the right, contains some damaged but wonderful **frescoes** from the fourteenth century by Ieréas Anastasiós, one vigorously portraying its eponymous saint slaying the dragon. Continuing a further kilometre beyond the turn-off for the church brings you to the **ancient site** (open access) beneath a number of metal canopies. These recent excavations have revealed the impressive remains of a Minoan settlement dating from the early second millennium BC, with many substantial dwellings and all the familiar features of Minoan architecture including light wells, benches and narrow corridors. Back on the main road just south of Apodhoúlou, with the coast coming into view, you can head down to Ayía Galíni (see p.278) or follow the flank of the mountains east around through Kamáres (see p.267).

Turn off west at Níthavris and you can curve round to complete a circuit of the Amári valley through the villages on the lower slopes of **Kédhros** (1777m). After 4km, at the hamlet of **Áyios Ioánnis**, there is a potential detour south for 3km to **Ayía Paraskeví** and its small **church of the Panayía**, on a rise to the left behind houses and opposite a large modern church to the right. It holds fine **frescoes** dating from the sixteenth century; if locked, enquire for the house of the *papás* up a street behind who will be only too pleased to open it up, find out where you are from and probably offer you a *raki*.

The route from Áyios Ioánnis now meanders westwards, descending in a series of spectacular hairpins into the valley of the River Plátis which reaches the sea at Ayía Galíni. The road crosses a bridge over the river and toils up the west slope of the valley into a greener landscape, taking in a succession of high villages as it heads towards Yerakári, the first of which is **Hordháki** (see p.277).

The western side of the Amári valley

The villages on the **western** side of the Amári valley look little different from those on the eastern side, but they are in fact almost entirely **modern** – rebuilt after their deliberate destruction during World War II. George Psychoundákis (see p.337) watched the outrage from a cave on the slopes of Psiloritís:

> I stayed there two or three days before leaving, watching the Kedros villages burning ceaselessly on the other side of the deep valley. Every now and then we heard the sound of explosions. The Germans went there in the small hours of the 22nd of August and the burning went on for an entire week. The villages we could see from there and which were given over to the flames were: Yerakari, Kardaki, Gourgouthoi, Vrysses, Smiles, Dryes and Ano-Meros. First they emptied every single house, transporting all the loot to Retimo, then they set fire to them, and finally, to complete the ruin, they piled dynamite into every remaining corner, and blew them sky high. The village schools met the same fate, also the churches and the wells, and at Ano-Meros they even blew up the cemetery. They shot all the men they could find.

Other villages around Psiloritís, from Anóyia to Kamáres, were also burned. Officially these atrocities were in reprisal for the kidnap of General Kreipe, four months earlier. But Psychoundákis, for one, believed that it was a more general revenge, intended to destroy any effective resistance in the closing months of the German occupation. Today the villages of Méronas, Elénes, Yerakári, Kardháki and Vrísses mark the southward progress of the German troops with etched stone **memorials** dated one day apart. Áno Méros has a striking war memorial of a woman wielding a hammer and chisel as she carves the names of the dead into the monument. But even here, a number of frescoed **churches** survived the terror. Between Vrísses and Kardháki one such lies off to the right of the road, lying low in a field of grain and apparently forgotten. Push the door aside, however, and the gloom gradually reveals beautiful Byzantine paintings around the altar.

Yerakári and around

Yerakári is a bigger, more modern and prosperous-looking village than most, with several places to stop for a drink or some food, and **accommodation** at *Taverna Rooms Gerakari* (Ⓣ 28330 51013; ①) on the main street. The taverna's kitchen is a veritable pickling and bottling factory for the fruits of the region – especially cherries, for which the village is famous – which are spread out to dry on every available rooftop during the picking season. The village cheeses, *thimarísio* (thyme honey) and pickled cherries are all for sale in a couple of stores and recommended, although their cherry brandy is probably an acquired taste.

With transport, you can take the spectacular road west from Yerakári to Spíli (see p.268), which offers tremendous views along a valley between the heights of Kédhros and Sorós towards the distant and magnificent Lefká Óri. The way to the road lies up the hill at the end of Yerakári's main street. Starting out unpromisingly as a rough dirt track, almost before you know it you're bowling along a superb asphalted highway thoroughly out of sync with what has gone before.

Just to the south of Yerakári and 1km before **Kardháki**, you'll come to the unusual **Monastery of Áyios Ioánnis Theológos**, with a spreading oak tree in front providing shade for a tapped spring. There are thirteenth-century **frescoes** in an exposed side chapel, and slightly later ones as you enter the church, all very battered and open to the elements. In recent years major subsidence has threatened the complete collapse of the church, and the frescoed roof is currently supported by iron staves. Some restoration work has taken place but tragically too late it seems to save the frescoes. Traces of the medieval stone road or track on which the church was originally aligned can still be made out behind it. Some 6km south of Khardháki the larger village of **Ano Méros** makes a pleasant place for a pause, and for **food** *Bar O Stinos* at the southern end of the main street has a fine terrace with a view across the valley. Three kilometres south from here lies **Hordháki**, with the road circuit to the eastern side of the valley completed 10km further on at Níthavris (see p.275).

ΠΕΣΟΝΤΕΣ ΚΑΤΑ
ΤΟ ΑΛΒΑΝΙΚΟΝ ΕΠΟΣ
1940 1941
ΙΩΑΝΝ. Γ. ΑΓΓΕΛΙΔΑΚΗΣ
ΜΙΧ. Ζ. ΔΙΑΜΑΝΤΑΚΗΣ
ΠΑΝΑΓ. Θ. ΜΑΘΙΟΥΔΑΚΗΣ
ΘΕΟΔ. Α. ΜΙΧΑΛΑΚΗΣ
ΙΩΑΝΝ. Θ. ΠΑΤΤΑΚΟΣ
ΔΗΜΟΣΘ. Μ. ΤΣΑΧΑΚΗΣ
ΠΕΣΟΝΤΕΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗΝ
ΜΑΧΗΝ ΤΗΣ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
ΤΟΝ ΜΑΙΟΝ ΤΟΥ 1941
ΑΝΤ. Ε. ΚΑΤΣΑΝΤΩΝΗΣ
ΓΕΩΡΓ. Ε. ΜΑΘΙΟΥΔΑΚΗΣ
ΡΙΜΙΝΙ ΙΤΑΛΙΑΣ
ΙΩΑΝΝ. Κ. ΠΕΡΑΚΗΣ
ΕΘΝΙΚΗ ΑΝΤΙΣΤΑΣΙΣ
1941–1945
ΛΕΩΝ. ΣΤ. ΒΑΡΟΥΧΑΣ
ΚΩΝΣ. Θ. ΣΤΑΥΡΟΥΛΑΚΗΣ
ΦΟΝΕΥΘΕΝΤΕΣ ΥΠΟ
ΤΩΝ ΓΕΡΜΑΝΩΝ
ΙΩΑΝΝ. Π. ΜΑΡΚΟΥΛΑΚΗΣ
ΤΗΛΕΜ. Η. ΜΠΑΓΟΥΡΑΚΗΣ
ΑΡΙΣΤ. Ε. ΤΖΙΤΖΙΚΑΣ
ΕΜΦΥΛΙΟΣ ΠΟΛΕΜΟΣ
ΓΕΩΓ. ΣΤ. ΒΑΡΟΥΧΑΣ
ΚΥΡ. Α. ΜΙΧΑΛΑΚΗΣ
ΙΩΑΝΝ. Κ. ΜΠΟΥΤΖΟΥΚΑΣ
Ν. ΒΙΕΤΝΑΜ 1968
ΕΛΕΥΘ Λ. ΜΙΧΑΛΑΚΗΣ
U.S.A. ARMY

△ War memorial

Méronas

Heading north along the road from Yerakári to complete the Amári valley's western flank, beyond Mesonísia and Elénes comes **Méronas** where, to the right of the road, a soft pink Venetian-style **church of the Panayía** (10am–2pm Mon–Wed & Fri–Sun; €2 contribution requested for upkeep of church) shelters frescoes from the fourteenth century. Again, it takes time to adjust your eyes to take in the painstaking detail of the artwork, darkened with age: a torch would allow you to see a great deal more than the candles or nightlights that usually provide illumination. Four kilometres further on is the **Ayía Fotiní** junction, passed by buses going to and from Réthimnon.

Ayía Galíni and around

Thirty years ago, **AYÍA GALÍNI** must have been an idyllic spot: an isolated fishing community of some five hundred souls nestling in a convenient fold of the mountains that dominate this part of the **south coast**. Although this was the port of ancient Sybritos (see p.273), the modern village is barely a hundred years old, its inhabitants having moved down from the mountain villages of Mélambes and Saktoúria as the traditional threat of piracy along the coast receded.

Catch it out of season and the streets of white houses, crowded in on three sides by mountains and opening below to a small, busy **harbour**, can still appeal. But this is a face that is increasingly hard to find. Chock-full throughout the season with package tourists, and confined by the limits of its narrow situation, the village's old houses are rapidly being squeezed out by ever-larger apartment buildings and concrete hotels. Since the beach was never a major asset anyway, if you're looking for strands with space to breathe you'll need to use the resort as a base for trips to nearby beaches or opt for a shorter stay. The lack of a decent beach is a shame, as is the use of the potentially picturesque harbour area as a car park, for otherwise there's something appealing about Ayía Galíni's relatively staid and respectable brand of tourism. With a vibrant nightlife plus plenty of bars and tavernas, the resort is a more inviting place than it looks, or than you'd expect from first impressions, largely because the people have stayed friendly and the atmosphere, despite the development, Cretan.

The **beach** at Ayía Galíni is astonishingly small for a place that bills itself as the province's major resort. Once the few patches of soft sand have been claimed you'll have to rent a chair if you hope to lounge in any comfort. It lies to the **east** of the village, reached by a narrow path that tracks around the cliff from the harbourfront, or by a very useful path that descends from the top of the town (reached via steps between the *Galini Mare* and *El Greco* hotels). You can also drive round and park by *Camping Agia Galini*. Walking round by the cliffs, you'll pass **caves** which in World War II served as gun emplacements. You can get food and drink at a number of places behind the beach; among the **tavernas**, *Kostas* is probably the best value, particularly for fish, but *Sunset* and *Romantica* (across the Plátis river at the beach's eastern end) are also good.

Further afield to the **west** are some much better patches of sand. **Boats** from the harbour (get details from any travel agent, or buy tickets when boarding) make daily day-trips to the beaches of Áyios Yeóryios and Áyios Pávlos (around €15 per person) as well as to the **Paximádhia islands** (around €20) 12km offshore and Palm Beach at Préveli (around €20), which have wonderful fine sand beaches but little shade, making a sun umbrella a must. **Dolphin-spotting** trips are run by the *O Faros* taverna (see p.280), which charges €25–30 for a five-hour voyage.

Arrival and information

Buses to Ayía Galíni terminate at the bus station by the church, in the village proper. It's a handy spot to get your bearings since few of the streets are named and such names as there are seem rarely used. The nucleus of the place is built around three streets that run down to the harbour. The first of these (Venizélou) is a continuation of the main road into town: along it you'll find the **post office**, bakery, doctor and a couple of car rental places. The narrow street parallel to this to the east is lined with stores, jewellery shops and travel agencies, while the next street along, for obvious reasons, is known locally as "Taverna Street". All of this falls within a very small area where nothing is more than a couple of minutes' walk away.

Many places near the post office **change money**, among them Creta Exchange, which gives bank rates; fifty metres further towards the harbour there's also an **ATM**. At the start of this road Ostria Rent a Car (ⓣ28320 91554, ⓦwww.ostria-agiagalini.com) claims to have the cheapest deals for **car rental** (around €140 per week for a Fiat 600 in high season); you can book online. The nearby Monza Travel (ⓣ28320 91004, ⓔmonzatravel@ret.forthnet.gr), a little nearer the harbour, also rents out cars and **bikes** (with a ten-percent discount offered to *Rough Guide* readers carrying this Guide) and is a good source of general information; they will also give money on credit cards. **Internet access** is available at *Café Zanzibar* (9am–midnight) next to the bus stop, at *Kafetería Kristos* (9am–2am) along Taverna Street and at the slightly cheaper *Alexander* (10am–midnight) on the east side of the harbourfront. Card **phone kiosks** can be found throughout the centre. A **bookshop** with a decent selection of English fiction, books about the island and foreign **newspapers** is Le Shop Kalliopi, just in from the harbour road close to the post office; international newspapers are also available from the shops on the road in from Réthimnon. A good **laundry**, Laundry Center (ⓣ28320 91336), lies just beyond the bus station, down a street almost opposite the post office.

Accommodation

There are so many **rooms** in Ayía Galíni that you can usually find something – though for much of July and August all but a handful are pre-booked by tour operators. Prices are very closely linked to demand: for most of the summer both are high, but not alarmingly so, and away from peak seasons you can often get an exceptional bargain.

Probably the best place to start looking is at the top of the town where the road from Réthimnon enters from the east. Other possibilities line the road descending to the harbour, although there aren't many places close to the waterfront. As many of the hotels around the entry road lack a pool, it's worth noting that at the *Apanema Pool Bar* close to the hotels *Avra* and *Astir* (p.280) you can take a dip and stretch out on a sun lounger for the price of a beer.

There's a **campsite**, *Camping Agia Galini* (April–Oct ⓣ28320 91386) to the east near the mouth of the Plátis river, reached either by a road which takes off from the main Réthimnon road about 1km east of the village, or by walking out along the beach.

Acteon Above the harbour ⓣ & ⓕ28320 91208. Reached by taking a left at the bottom of Taverna Street, this is an economical option for balcony rooms with great harbour views; all rooms are en suite and most have a/c and fridge. ①

Agapitos Along the road descending to the harbour on right ⓣ28320 91164. Attractive a/c studios with kitchenette, TV and balcony. ②

Argiro Apartments Along the road descending to the harbour on the left ⓣ28320 91470, ⓔargiro-roukonaki@hotmail.com. Bright and fresh a/c rooms and studios (latter with kitchenette) and sea-view balconies. ②

Hotel Astir Up the street on the right off the entry road from Réthimnon Ⓣ28320 91174, Ⓕ28320 91530. Decent hotel where a/c balcony rooms (at rear) come with a sea view. Breakfast included. ②

Hotel Avra Right-turn off the entry road from Réthimnon (signed) after *Hotel Idi* Ⓣ28320 91476 Ⓕ28320 91544. This sparkling modern hotel offers probably the best deal of the upmarket places in this zone. Balcony rooms come with fridge, a/c and breakfast is included in the price. ②

Hotel El Greco Entry road from Réthimnon on the left Ⓣ28320 91187, Ⓔhotelgreco@yahoo.com. Pleasant upmarket hotel offering balcony rooms with sea views. Some rooms with TV and/or fridge. A/c costs €7 extra. There are some cheaper rooms lacking a sea view. ③–④

Hotel Glaros At the foot of the road descending to the harbour on the right Ⓣ28320 91151, Ⓦwww.glaros-agiagalini.com. Plant-bedecked upmarket place with a/c balcony rooms complete with fridge, some with views. Also squeezes in a small pool. ④

Hotel Hariklia On the entry road from Réthimnon just before the descent Ⓣ & Ⓕ28320 91257, Ⓦwww.agia-galini.com. Delightful spotless pension with good harbour views and en-suite a/c rooms with fridge. Guests also have use of kitchen to prepare breakfasts and snacks. ②

Hotel Idi Entry road from Réthimnon opposite *Hotel Minos* Ⓣ& Ⓕ28320 91152. Friendly small hotel where comfortable balcony rooms come with fridge and a/c or fans. ②

Irini Mare Behind the beach Ⓣ28320 91404, Ⓦwww.irinimare.com. Upmarket hotel with rooms 100m from the strand. All rooms are a/c, have a balcony sea-view and there's a restaurant and car park. ⑦

Hotel Minos Entry road from Réthimnon on the left after *Hotel El Greco* Ⓣ28320 91292, Ⓔhotelminos@agia-galini.com. Excellent-value place for rooms with own balcony or terrace and sea-views; a/c €5 extra. ①

Hotel Neos Ikaros At the foot of the road descending to the harbour and a little beyond the turn off for *Hotel Ostria*. Reached via a concrete bridge but only five minutes away from the action, this spacious garden hotel has a full-sized pool and all a/c rooms have balcony or terrace and come equipped with TV and fridge. ③

Hotel Ostria Signed (to the right) off the foot of the road descending to the harbour Ⓣ28320 91404, Ⓦwww.ostria-agiagalini.com. Pleasant balcony rooms in a family hotel. ②–③

Eating, drinking and nightlife

One major and undeniable benefit that the crowds have brought to Ayía Galíni is a vast range of **food** and **drink**, much of it excellent and, thanks to the competition, not overpriced. Most places lie along Taverna Street, which in the evening is choked with pedestrian traffic. There are plenty of economical – if rather unexciting – options here with tables spilling out into the street, but it's worth hunting out some more tempting places only a few minutes away. Once you've eaten you can sample the town's boisterous **nightlife** scene, which lifts off around midnight in summer.

Bars and **clubs** are concentrated around the bottom of Taverna Street and near the harbour. Music explodes from these places after 11pm; *Zorba's*, where dancing starts after midnight, is a long-established favourite. Neighbouring *Juke Box*, at the foot of Taverna Street, is another venue, whilst the nearby *Paradiso* also attracts its share of after-midnight revellers. One place with a slightly more mature crowd is *Blue Bar* at the foot of the middle of the streets leading up from the harbour, where late-night carousing takes place to jazz and pre-1980s oldies.

Bozos On the harbourfront. One of the best of the harbourfront places for the usual taverna standard dishes.

Café Platía On a small square slightly south of the bus stop. Famed for its breakfasts (omelettes, fruit salads and muesli all feature), it also does snack meals and freshly made *loukoumádhes* (honey puffs).

Charley's Place Up a narrow street heading east from the bus stop. A popular place and good for grills and *mezédhes*, besides being relatively quiet and out of the way.

O Faros On the next street west of, and running parallel to, Taverna Street. The resort's best and most unpretentious fish restaurant, where the friendly family who run it serve up what they catch themselves with their own boat (used also for dolphin-spotting trips; see p.278). Has a small street terrace.

Madame Hortense Set back from the east side of the harbour Ⓣ08320 91215. Slightly pricier and more stylish than the competition and named after Zorba the Greek's floozy in the classic novel. A timber-floored dining room offers great views over the harbour. The menu is sprinkled with Greek, Mediterranean and Cretan specialities (the house *kleftiko* is recommended) and includes a few more exotic – mildly curried – dishes from Asia.

Miro To the right off Taverna St a little way down. Almost the last traditional *kafenío* in town stubbornly clings to its identity in the face of the surrounding mayhem; a fine place to people-watch at the outdoor tables with an ouzo and a few plates of *mezédhes*.

Restaurant Onar Taverna St Ⓣ08320 91121. At the bottom of this street and near the harbour, this is perhaps the best value of all for wholesome traditional food – charcoal grilled fish and meat is a speciality. The bonus is a great setting, overlooking the harbour from a rooftop terrace.

Pantheon Taverna St. With an entrance almost opposite the *Onar*, this is another reasonably priced taverna with an attractive roof terrace.

To Petrino Fifty metres north of the bus stop up a side road. Friendly little gem of an *ouzerí* whose proprietor is an ex-sea captain. Serves breakfast and coffee plus excellent *mezédhes* later in the day, and retains some of the flavour of the pre-tourist days.

La Strada Close to the northern end of Taverna St. Good pizza and decent pasta and risotto served on a street terrace; the brothers who run it are accomplished performers on the *lyra* and *laoúto* (lute) and often treat their customers to an impromptu concert.

Around Ayía Galíni

About 3km west of Ayía Galíni, the seaside hamlet of **Áyios Yeóryios** (connected by an asphalted road to the Ayía Galini–Mélambes road) is fairly easily reached on foot: take the main road up past the bus station, and at the crown of the first bend follow a left turn (signed) towards a group of apartments. Just beyond these, cross a dry river bed and head up the hillside on a well-worn path marked with splashes of red paint. The beach is almost two hours away, a shingle cove with two tavernas, one of which, *Nikos* (May–Oct mobile Ⓣ6944504859, Ⓦwww.aggeorgios.gr; ③), has en-suite air-conditioned rooms with fridge. The eponymous and voluble proprietor serves whatever he's caught from the sea on the taverna's terrace; there are a couple of other, less attractive coves along the way.

Áyios Pávlos, 8km further west as the crow flies, but quite a few more along the meandering backroads, is served by **boat trips** from Ayía Galíni. It's also much more attractive than Áyios Yeóryios, with some striking rock formations around a sheltered bay, and excellent snorkelling. The main **beach** here can make for difficult bathing due to slippery rocks and, in summer, strong winds. Both of these problems can be avoided by going a bit further west over the headland, where there's fine sand and a more sheltered beach. In addition to the people arriving by boat from Ayía Galíni, Áyios Pávlos for some years has been home to a colony of New Age practitioners who run intensive **yoga** and related courses at their centre, Yoga Plus (bookable in advance only; Ⓦwww.yogaplus.co.uk). Áyios Pávlos also has some apartments and two **taverna/rooms** places: the first, *Ayios Pavlos* (Ⓣ28320 71104, Ⓦwww.agiospavloshotel.gr; ③), has a hotel attached complete with en-suite air-conditioned rooms and studios as well as **Internet access**. The slightly less pricey *Mama Eva* (Ⓣ28320 71108; ③), also immediately above the beach, is another option for air-conditioned rooms. The *Panorama* (Ⓣ28320 71106; ②) is a taverna-rooms place set back from the sea and visible from the road on the way in: the en-suite balcony rooms have air conditioning and fridge. Set even further back along the entry road, the *Livikon* (Ⓣ28320 71101; ②) has similar en-suite rooms, plus a taverna serving fresh fish caught daily with its own boat.

The boat from Ayía Galíni is perhaps the most pleasant way to get to Áyios Pávlos, but you can also drive via Áyios Yeóryios and **Saktóuria**, on a sealed road. This is now the quicker route, but another slightly longer scenic drive there (or back) is to take the old main road out of Ayía Galíni northwest through **Mélambes** towards Spíli, turning left (signed) after about 12km to go through upper and lower Saktóuria, an exhilaratingly winding route with great views. Sadly, the landscape was blighted due to **fires** in 2000 and 2003, but it is now recovering.

Plakiás and around

Three routes towards Plakiás branch off from the main Réthimnon–Ayía Galíni road. The main one, signed to Plakiás, heads down towards the coast via the spectacular **Kourtaliótiko gorge**; an alternative route, signed to Selliá, comes through the only slightly less impressive **Kotsifóu gorge**. Either way, it's worth pulling over in the gorge to take time to appreciate the scenery and the wildlife, from snakes by the water to vast birds of prey soaring above. If you're coming from the south you can also turn off at Mixórrouma, from where you head to Áyia Pelayía and then join the Kourtaliótiko gorge route via the village of Fráti – a wonderfully scenic drive.

About halfway through the Kourtaliótiko gorge there are parking places and steps leading down to the chapel of **Áyios Nikólaos** near the bottom – a good place to break your journey. Further on, you have a choice of turning right for Plakiás, passing through **Asómatos** and **Lefkóyia** (see p.287), or continuing to follow the course of the Megalopótamos river all the way down to **Préveli** (p.287). Just before the Kotsifóu gorge there's a really excellent inexpensive taverna, *Iliomanolis*, in the village of **Kánevos**. This route eventually opens out to leave you on the main coast road west of Plakiás; turn right for **Selliá** (p.289), left for **Mírthios** and Plakiás.

Inland from Plakiás there's plenty of country for **walkers** and nature-lovers to explore – especially around the gorges – as well as a number of small, relatively undeveloped villages, a couple of which have accommodation and make possible alternative bases.

Plakiás

PLAKIÁS, 35km south of Réthimnon, is a well-established resort, though it's still a long way from the big league. Commercialized as it is, Plakiás has a very different feel to somewhere like Ayía Galíni – the accommodation is simpler, less of it is booked up in advance, the nearby beaches are infinitely better and it attracts a younger crowd. Don't come for sophisticated nightlife or for a picturesque white Greek island village: what you'll find instead is a lively, friendly place with a decent town beach that makes a good base for **walks** in the beautiful surrounding countryside and trips to far better **beaches** all around.

Arrival and information

The approach roads merge to **enter Plakiás** from the east, behind the beach, and then head straight into the heart of things along the **sea front**. Virtually everything in Plakiás lies along or just off this main road beside the sea, or on one of the alleys connecting it to the single street that runs inland, rapidly deteriorating into paths which wind up towards Selliá and Mírthios. Continuing through town, the coast road westwards ends after 3km or so at **Soúdha beach** (p.285), though you can turn off to head up to Selliá and the main road west via a vertiginous series of narrow hairpin bends.

Every facility you're likely to need can be found within a few paces of the waterfront. The travel agencies here are the best source of local **information**; you'll also find car hire places, a post office, bike rental, ATMs and money exchange, several supermarkets, and plenty of places to eat and drink. **Buses** arrive and depart from a stop just east of the little bridge, roughly halfway along the sea front opposite the big Forum supermarket: the timetable is usually pinned up and is also displayed at nearby travel agencies.

Accommodation

While there are scores of **hotels** and **rooms** in Plakiás – indeed at times it seems there's little else – you may have difficulty finding a vacancy in high season. As ever, it's a question of wandering around and asking everywhere: the places on the backstreets lack the sea views but are quieter and usually the last to fill. Many of these are found on the street parallel to the coast, heading towards the *Youth Hostel* – get there from behind the *Alianthos Garden Hotel*, or by following the street past the post office. There are also lots of new studio/apartment complexes on the road as you approach town and along the coast towards Soúdha beach, and, slightly further afield, options at the beaches to the west such as Dhamnóni or Amoúdhi. You can find excellent lists of local accommodation online at Ⓦwww.plakias-filoxenia.gr and Ⓦwww.rethymnon.gr/catalogue_en.htm.

Pension Afrodite At the back of the village near the little church Ⓣ28320 31266, Ⓔkasel@hol.gr. A charming, gleaming-white pension with spotless en-suite rooms and apartments. It's set in a quiet location with lots of cascading bougainvillea. ②

Alianthos Beach Hotel At the start of the sea-front road Ⓣ28320 31196, Ⓦwww.alianthosbeach.com. Exceptionally friendly, somewhat old-fashioned hotel with a good taverna beneath. Plain, en-suite rooms, but those at the front have balconies overlooking the beach. Breakfast included. ④

Alianthos Garden Hotel Directly behind the *Alianthos Beach Hotel* Ⓣ28320 31280, Ⓦwww.alianthos.gr. The biggest and fanciest hotel in town – which is to say it has a lift to connect its three storeys and 94 rooms, as well as pool, bar, taverna and play area. All rooms are en-suite, with TV, fridge and a/c – though even here, they charge extra to use it. ⑥

Anthos Apartments East of town, above the beach Ⓣ28320 32018, Ⓦwww.anthos.kreta-sun.com. Comfortable a/c apartments with kitchen, balcony and satellite TV sharing a small pool. ③

Camping Apollonia On the right as you approach town Ⓣ28320 31318, Ⓕ28320 31607. Small and rather cramped site, but the location is excellent, and the good facilities include a minimarket and pool. Tents and caravans available to rent. ①

Eolos On a street running inland immediately west of the *Alianthos Beach Hotel* Ⓣ28320 31022. Tempting fate by naming their good-value accommodation after the god of the winds, the hospitable couple here have plain but well-equipped rooms with bath, TV and a/c. ②

Gio-ma In a prime position overlooking the harbour at the west end of the seafront Ⓣ28320 32003, Ⓦwww.gioma.gr. Some fabulously sited if small and rather basic rooms (with bath and a/c) above the taverna of the same name, right on the water. Over the road there are comfortable modern studios and apartments – more expensive, but still good value. Rooms ②, studios ③

Glaros Western edge of town, on the coast past the harbour Ⓣ & Ⓕ28320 31746. Above the taverna of the same name, *Glaros* has a flexible layout allowing some of its modern a/c rooms to be combined as apartments. Fabulous sunset views from big balconies in their best rooms: all have bath and fridge, some with kitchen. ③

Ippokambos On the inland street parallel to the sea Ⓣ28320 31525, Ⓔamoutsos@otenet.gr. Modern and friendly rooms place behind the seafront with simple, well-presented rooms, all with bath, balcony and fridge. Own car park. ②

Morpheas Apartments On the sea front, above Plakias Market Ⓣ28320 31583, Ⓦwww.morpheas-apartments-plakias-crete-greece.com. Fine modern rooms, studios and duplex apartments with balconies looking out over the beach. Double-glazed against the potentially noisy location, with a/c, TV, fridge and in the larger apartments even a washing machine. Rooms ③, large apartments ⑥

Oasis About 1km out of town, on the main road near the Dhamnóni turn-off Ⓣ28320 31317, Ⓦwww.interkriti.net/hotel/plakias/oasis/. One of the best of the places east of town, it makes use of the extra space to provide gardens, a small pool, and its own little taverna. Rooms ②, apartments ③

Paligremnos Beach At the eastern end of the town beach, about 500m from town Ⓣ28320 31835, Ⓦwww.paligremnos.com. Small studio complex with its own taverna and garden with kids' play area in a quiet location right by the beach. Good-value a/c studios and apartments have kitchenette and balcony overlooking the sea. ②

Phoenix Apartments 1.5km west near Soúdha beach ⓣ28320 32108, ⓦwww.phoenix-plakias.com. Tranquil complex with a good-size pool in a great spot above the sea. Studios and three-room apartments are all a/c and well equipped. Studio ③, large apartment ⑥

Skinos Apartments At two locations on the road to Soúdha beach, one about 300m from town, the other 500m ⓣ28320 31737, ⓦwww.skinos.net. *Skinos I* is a simple rooms place, *Skinos II* has slightly more modern apartments: all are very quiet, with shower, a/c, fridge and large balconies looking out to sea; the apartments also have kitchens. Rooms ②, apartments ③

Youth Hostel Inland a little way behind town (follow the signs) ⓣ28320 32118, ⓦwww.yhplakias.com. The best hostel on Crete? Probably – friendly, relaxed and well-run, in an attractively rural setting, with a terrace for breakfast and evening drinks and a busy social life. Hot showers included. Dorms €8.

Eating

The seafront street is lined with **tavernas**, cafés and bars, but the prime position is towards the harbour right at the centre of town, where a strip of places have tables next to the water. You'll pay a bit more here than at other places in town – in fact food in Plakiás is generally costly by Cretan standards – but the setting is worth it. For **breakfast**, there are a number of bakeries along here too, and many of the cafés open early.

Candia Bakery Between the hotels *Livikon* and *Lamon* on the sea front. A good place for breakfast, and throughout the day for coffee, juices and take-away snacks and pies.

Gio-Ma Overlooking the harbour at the west end of the sea front. Along with neighbouring *Christos*, *Gio-Ma* has probably the best location of all, sharing a pleasant tamarisk-shaded terrace. *Christos* is one of the longest-established in town, famous for its fish, but standards seem to have slipped, giving its neighbour the edge.

Taverna Kastro High on the hill behind the town. *Kastro*'s fine terrace with great views complements friendly service and some original and tasty dishes such as *kounéli* (rabbit with a lemon and garlic sauce). It's signed by road, or on foot you can follow the path through the olive groves beside the *Alianthos Garden Hotel*, looking out for the taverna's crenellated roofline above you.

Kri Kri Near the bridge on the sea front. *Kri Kri* has good pizza from a wood-fired oven as well as all the taverna standards.

Lysseos Near the bridge. A nice seting with food that's a little more ambitious than most in Plakiás.

Taverna Medousa At the eastern end of the inland street, near the back of the *Alianthos Garden* hotel. A good, welcoming and traditional taverna with prices noticeably lower than those on the front. Also stocks some decent bottled wine in addition to the usual barreled house wine.

Nikos Souvlaki By the post office on the street running inland from the front. Probably the cheapest place in town serving up excellent *souvláki* or fish and chips to take away, or eat in at one of the few small tables.

On the Rocks Overlooking the beach at the western end of town. Café-bar serving good breakfasts, and later in the day ice cream and cocktails.

Secret Nest Taverna At the back of town, inland from behind the harbour. A change of scene with fish and other dishes served on a pleasant terrace.

Sofia On the sea front near the bus stop. Best of the group of tavernas right by the sea; friendly with good portions, and a slightly less tourist-influenced menu than some of its neighbours.

Psarotaverna Tassomanolis Facing west along the shore beyond the harbour. *Tassomanolis* is one of three or four good places facing this way. Specializes in fish, caught by the proprietor from his own boat.

Bars and nightlife

Nightlife in Plakiás is rather sedate, especially when compared to the excesses of the north coast or even neighbouring Ayía Galíni. The few **bars** don't take much finding, since the music will lead you there. Most are lined up on the waterfront, keeping people who stay here awake. *Smerna*, *Gialos* and *Ostraco*, right next to each other by the harbour, both offer a variety of drinks and cocktails and, as the night gets on, music. At night, the balcony upstairs at *Ostraco* is the place to be. Between these three the *Avra* crêperie offers late-night sustenance – as well as coffee, ice cream and cocktails earlier in the day. A few other cafés operate as bars at night, and the tavernas generally stay open until the last customer leaves, but the only real nightspot is *Nufaro*, near the bridge, where things start to get going around midnight.

Beaches

Getting to the **beach** involves no more than a two-minute walk. The town is set at the western end of the bay, and east of the paved harbour grey sand curves around in an unbroken line to the headland 1km or more away, with an increasing amount of development behind it. Unfortunately, this beach looks better from a distance than from close up – the long open sweep of the bay means it can be exposed and gusty, and the strong summer **winds** seem to affect Plakiás more than other places along this coast. There's plenty of space – especially towards the far end – but you'll find much better sands beyond the headland at Dhamnóni (see p.286), or to the west at Soúdha beach.

Soúdha beach is just over half-an-hour's walk west of town, past signs of encroaching development, and there are places to stop for a swim along the way. The sand is mostly grey and coarse, but there's plenty of room and the water at the far end is sheltered by rocks. Above the very end of the beach, the *Galini* **taverna** enjoys a lovely position in a miniature palm grove.

Listings

Boat trips Numerous travel agencies can sell you tickets for boat trips to Préveli and Áyios Pávlos (some call at Dhamnóni en route), or simply turn up at the harbour; the *Venus* among others leaves for Préveli's Palm Beach daily at 10.30am & 1.30pm (returning at 2pm & 4pm).

Books and newspapers International press and books in English are available at most of the supermarkets on the sea front; try Forum.

Car and bike rental There are plenty of outlets, including several on the seafront; Alianthos, at the *Alianthos Beach Hotel* (ⓣ28320 31851, ⓦwww.alianthos-group.com), is excellent, or try Moto Auto Plakiás (ⓣ28320 31785), or Monza (ⓣ28320 31433). Easy Ride (ⓣ28320 20052, ⓦwww.easyride.reth.gr), by the post office, rents out good modern mountain bikes as well as scooters and motorbikes.

Diving Some of Crete's best diving is near Plakiás, and there are also easy beaches for learners. Dive2gether is a Dutch company that has a new PADI dive centre with learning pool (and accommodation) near Soúdha beach and an office on the front, west of the bridge (ⓣ28320 32313, ⓦwww.dive2gether.com); Kalypso Rocks Dive Centre (ⓣ28310 20990, ⓦwww.kalypsodivingcenter.com) organizes dives at the nearby Kalypso Rocks resort – its office, just off the front behind the harbour, is open 5–9pm only.

Doctor A doctor's surgery and a pharmacy are in the street by the post office.

Horse riding The country around Plakiás is great to explore on horseback; pony trekking and lessons can be arranged through the *Alianthos Beach Hotel* (ⓣ28320 31196).

Internet The *Ostraco* and *Gialos* bars both have Internet terminals, as does the café above the Forum supermarket.

Money There's no bank in Plakiás, but there are four ATMs along the sea-front street and you can change money at most travel agents and some supermarkets.

Post office On the street running inland near the *Hotel Livikon*; Mon–Fri 7.30am–2pm.

Supermarkets The biggest are Forum, immediately east of the bridge; Plakiás Market, between the *Livikon* and *Lamon* hotels, and one on the edge of town by the *Alianthos Beach Hotel*, which has a bakery on one side and an excellent fruit shop on the other.

Taxis For local tours, airport trips etc, there's a taxi office at the bottom of the street to the post office, or try ⓣ28320 31610, 31287 or 31922.

Travel agents There are several in town, including Monza Travel on the seafront next to the *Hotel Lamon* (ⓣ28320 31433), Alianthos Travel, next to the Forum supermarket (ⓣ28320 31851), and Finikas Travel (look for Moto Auto Plakiás ⓣ28320 32234) nearby.

Walks Check out the travel agencies above for organized walking tours of the local area. If you want to go it alone there are excellent walking guides and a map of the local area by Lance Chilton (see p.462), usually available at the Plakiás

Market supermarket – try to get a recent edition, as development has altered a few of the routes (web updates are available at ⓦwww.marengowalks.com). Several local walks are also described in detail at ⓦwww.peter-thomson.co.uk/crete/contents.html.

Dhamnóni and nearby beaches

Just to the east of Plakiás Bay, beyond a headland riddled with caves and wartime bunkers and gun emplacements, lie some of the most tempting **beaches** in central Crete, albeit a very poorly kept secret. Three splashes of yellow sand, divided by rocky promontories, go by the general name of **Dhamnóni**. If you have transport it's easier to drive, but plenty of people walk, too: follow the main road east and turn right along a track which leads through the olive groves. After a while you'll see the beach below you and a path which runs down to it – about thirty minutes in all. **Driving**, you have to go much further round: follow the road towards Lefkóyia and turn down at the sign for Dhamnóni or, further on, for Amoúdhi.

Dhamnóni beach itself is the first you reach, and the only one that has so far really seen much development: the western half has been colonized by an ugly Swiss-owned holiday village, *Hapimag*, while the road down to the beach has an increasing number of new **rooms** places. The oldest of these is the charming, family-oriented *Damnoni Paradise* (ⓣ28320 31480, ⓦwww.damnoni-paradise.kreta-sun.com; ②–④), surrounded by a dense garden whose palms, jasmine and bougainvillea offer welcome shade; a variety of en-suite rooms are available, as well as a couple of larger apartments. The **beach** is a wonderfully long strip of yellow sand and super-clear water. Of the two **tavernas**, *Taverna Damnoni*, fronting the sand, often has grudging, slow service, though the food is good enough; *Taverna Akti*, just behind, is much more friendly.

At the far eastern end of Dhamnóni beach you're likely to find a few people who've dispensed with their clothes, at least out of season, and the little cove which shelters the middle of the three beaches (a scramble over the rocks, or a very rough track) is almost entirely **nudist**. This enclave can get very crowded, and at times looks like an illustration from *Health and Efficiency* magazine – blow-up beach balls and all – but they're a good-humoured bunch and, unusually, often include quite a few Greek naturists too. Again, the water is beautiful and there are caves at the back of the beach and rocks to dive from. There's some great snorkelling to be had around these rocks with their caves and passages. Continuing over the rocks you pass another tiny pocket of sand (also nudist) before **Amoúdhi beach**, where there's a rather more sedate atmosphere and another **taverna** attached to the *Ammoudi Hotel* (ⓣ28320 31355, ⓦwww.ammoudi.gr; ③ with breakfast). This is a fabulous place to get away from it all, with balcony en-suite rooms 100m from the shore; rooms and food are expensive for what you get, though.

Skhínaria beach is almost adjacent to Amoúdhi, but to get there you have to drive several kilometres round, via Lefkóyia. Another fine, sandy cove, it's popular with Greek families at holiday times and weekends, and occasionally hosts groups learning to scuba dive, but is otherwise delightfully quiet. There's a taverna open during the day, the *Lybian Star*.

Mírthios and inland

The village of **Mírthios** hangs high above Plakiás, with wonderful views over the bay. The youth hostel which put it on the map for generations of travellers has long gone, but several classy new **places to stay** have opened in recent years – mainly studio/apartment developments whose rooms look down over Plakiás. Among the best of them are 🏃 *Apartments Anna* (ⓣ69733 24775, ⓦwww.annaview.com; ③–⑤) and *Village Apartments* (ⓣ28320 31835, ⓦhttp://village.kreta-sun.com;

③–④), both of which have a variety of different-sized, well-equipped studios and apartments. The main disadvantage of staying here is that there are few facilities beyond a couple of small shops and a post office, so you really need transport. You can, however, walk down to Plakiás, about twenty minutes steeply downhill, or to several of the nearby beaches – the walk back up is tougher, though. Alternatively, the Plakiás **bus** usually comes up to Mírthios after it has dropped most of the passengers (it may drop you at the junction, about ten minutes' walk away).

For food, the ★ *Taverna Plateia* (Ⓣ28320 31560), right in the middle of the village, is the longest established **restaurant**, recently refurbished and taken distinctly upmarket; thankfully, the excellent traditional food and decor, and stunning views, remain. It can get very busy, especially at Sunday lunchtimes, so book if you want to be sure of getting in. *Dionysos* and *Panorama* nearby are cheaper, more straightforward tavernas with equally fine vistas.

Lefkóyia and Asómatos

If lying on the beach were your only plan, you'd have less far to walk, and you'd probably spend less, staying in the village of **Lefkóyia** rather than Plakiás. Lefkóyia is barely twenty minutes' walk from Amoúdhi or Skhínaria beaches and has a couple of minimarkets, four or five pleasant **rooms** places – such as *Didima* (Ⓣ28320 31070; ②) – and a couple of **tavernas** by the main road. However, Lefkóyia is not especially attractive, it's not on the coast, it has no views, and it remains primarily an agricultural village where tourism is something of an afterthought.

The more appealing village of **Asómatos** is a little further from Plakiás, near the bottom of the Kourtaliótiko gorge on the main route from Réthimnon, and at the junction of roads that head on towards Plakiás via Lefkóyia (the main route) or Mírthios. Built on a steep hillside, it's bigger than it first appears. The chief attraction is a remarkable **folk museum** (Mon–Sat 10am–3pm; €2) assembled by the octogenarian, now retired, local priest Papas Michalis Georgoulákis in his elegant courtyarded family home. Besides the usual articles of everyday life, the collection includes an ancient Cretan kitchen, a section on World War II and an old office with all its antique equipment. The priest's family, who act as curators, rent out pleasant and good-value **apartments** (Ⓣ28320 31158, Ⓔfaragi@ret.forthnet.gr; ②) in a rural spot nearby, which would serve as an ideal base for walking in the area.

Moní Préveli and Palm Beach

Between Asómatos and Lefkóyia paved road turns off and descends into the fertile valley of the Megalopótamos river, which, unusually for Crete, flows throughout the year. Where it meets the river, the road turns south to climb past the fenced-off ruins of the **Monastery of Áyios Ioánnis** (aka Káto, or Lower, Préveli). The site of the original sixteenth-century monastery of Préveli, it was left behind the following century by the decision to move to the greater safety of the present site further uphill. Torched by the Turks in the nineteenth century and long abandoned, only the church now stands complete amid the broken walls, cattle mangers and derelict dwellings.

Some 2km further on, the celebrated **Monastery of Préveli** itself (April & May daily 8am–7pm; June–Oct Mon–Sat 8am–1.30pm & 3.30–7.30pm, Sun 8am–7.30pm; in winter, knock for admission; €2.50) is perched high above the sea. The monastery is proud of its role in centuries of Cretan resistance, but is famed above all for the shelter provided to Allied troops, many of them Australian, stranded on the island after the Battle of Crete in World War II. The monks supported and fed many soldiers and helped organize them into groups to be taken

△ Palm Beach

off nearby beaches by submarine. There's a startling new monument to this, overlooking the sea just before the monastery, depicting a life-sized rifle-toting abbot and an Allied soldier cast in bronze. More commemorative plaques decorate the monastery interior and alongside the icons in the church are a number of offerings from grateful individuals and governments. The church also houses a cross said to contain a fragment of the True Cross; there's a small museum with other relics and religious vestments; and a fountain in the courtyard with the palindromic

Greek inscription "Wash your sins, not only your face". There are also fine views out to sea towards the distant and chunky-looking Paximádhia islands, which take their name from the tooth-cracking lumps of twice-baked bread served up with *mezédhes* in the island's *kafenía*.

In summer two daily **buses** run from Réthimnon to Préveli; the morning one goes via Plakiás. Check current times locally. You can also get here by taking a boat to Palm Beach and climbing up – a strenuous thirty minutes or so, via the car park.

Palm Beach

Further back on the Préveli road you'll have passed an ancient-looking bridge across the river (actually a nineteenth-century copy of a Venetian original), where a sign indicates a left turn to **Palm Beach**. The *Taverna Gefyra* here makes a pleasant pit stop. Almost immediately you turn right, shortly crossing another cobbled Venetian bridge, beyond which the track leads – after perhaps twenty minutes' tortuous, rough driving – to the *Amoudi Taverna* (Ⓣ69457 04654; ②), one of two places that offer basic **rooms**, some with a great view, on a not terribly attractive beach alongside Palm Beach. From here, Palm Beach is a five-minute climb around the cliff via a stairway carved into the rock – and your first view of it as you reach the crest is quite stunning.

An alternative, and probably easier, route is to continue towards Préveli monastery and follow the signs to the **car park** (€1.50). From here a well-marked, stepped path with dramatic views clambers steeply down over the rocks – a ten-minute descent to Palm Beach, fifteen to twenty sweaty minutes back up. **Boat trips** from Plakiás and Ayía Galíni will get you here with a great deal less fuss.

Sadly, **Palm Beach** is no longer really worth all this effort, except at the beginning of the season. It still looks beautiful – a sand-filled cove right at the end of the Kourtaliótiko gorge, where a freshwater estuary feeds a little oasis complete with palm grove and cluster of oleanders – but too many visitors have ruined it. Loungers, sun umbrellas and pedalos have diminished the natural charm and, despite the best efforts of the authorities, there's a real problem with plastic rubbish – take everything you bring away with you. Behind the beach, you can walk up the palm-lined riverbanks or paddle through the icy water upstream. Lots of people **camp** along the banks – a lovely setting – but again they have no way of disposing of their rubbish and sewage, and the authorities are now publicizing the fact that camping here is forbidden with threats of eviction. Further upstream, before the gorge becomes too steep to follow, are a couple of deep pools nice to swim in. On the west edge of the beach, a small **bar-taverna** provides basic food and sells drinks, snacks and a few basic provisions, mostly tinned. It's a strange thought, as you lie on the crowded sands, that from here, in 1941, many of the Allied soldiers who sought refuge at Moní Préveli were evacuated by submarine.

West of Plakiás: Selliá and Rodhákino

Heading **west** from Plakiás towards Frangokástello, it's a stiff climb up towards Mírthios and then round, hugging the mountainside, to **Selliá**. You can also approach Selliá direct by an alarmingly steep, winding road climbing from the coast west of Plakiás. Looking up from Plakiás or across from Mírthios you would imagine that Selliá had the best views of all across this area, but if you drive through you see nothing: it is only the backs of the houses that face out across the sea towards Africa. If you want to stop and take a look it's easy enough to find a path through: better still, stop for a drink or bite at the *Taverna Kokkinakis*, a tiny, simple place at the bottom of the square by the "folk art museum" (actually a private gallery), with food to match the views. You can walk from the centre of the village down to Plakiás, a steep thirty minutes below, or you could include Selliá in a long circular hike from Plakiás.

Beyond Selliá the nature of the country changes and there's a real feeling of the approach of western Crete. The road runs high above a series of capes and small coves, quite a good surface all the way to Argoulés and beyond. The only village of any size is **Rodhákino**, whose two halves are set on steep streets divided by a dramatic ravine. Below is the small, grey sand and shingle beach of **Koráka**, where General Kreipe was finally taken off the island after his kidnap in 1944 (see p.427). Some development has started on the coast around here, and if you want to get away from it all there are a few good **rooms** places. *Sunrise*, a short way up the hill above the beach (ⓣ28320 31787, ⓦwww.sunrise-aprts.gr; ③–④ with breakfast), has a small pool, rooms and apartments with sea view and a **taverna** with rooftop terrace. Down at the beach, *Arokaria* (ⓣ28320 32161, ⓦwww.rethymno.com/arokaria; ③) is an excellent taverna whose pleasant rooms have views as well as TV, a/c, en suite and kitchenette. The beach road continues west as far as **Polirízos** in the next bay along. Here there are more rooms places and villas above a small beach: *Panorama* (ⓣ28320 31788; ③) and the attached *Taverna Katerina* are worth a try.

Continuing west the main road winds high above the coast. A number of beaches look tempting from high but hardly any are accessible. Signs of development increase as you approach Frangokástello (p.367), with villas, a few isolated rooms places and even the odd taverna. New tracks connecting these places pop up all the time, which makes things confusing: however, if you drive towards the coast you can often find a way through, though the last bit may be on foot. Some of the best are found by following the sign from the main road to **Lákki beach** – follow the dirt road straight on (avoid being seduced by new bits of tarmac or signs to tavernas) and you'll reach a headland from which you can easily walk down to a couple of beautiful patches of sand.

Greek place names

ΑΓ ΓΑΛΗΝΗ	Αγ Γαλίνη	Ay. Galíni
ΑΝΩΓΙΕΑ	Ανώγεια	Anóyia
ΑΣΙΓΩΝΙΑ	Ασιγων›α	Asigonía
ΑΞΟΣ	Αξός	Axós
ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ	Επιοκοπή	Episkopí
ΘΡΟΝΟΣ	Θρόνος	Thrónos
ΚΑΜΑΡΕΣ	Καμάρες	Kamáres
ΛΕΥΚΟΓΕΙΑ	Λευκόγεια	Lefkóyia
Μ. ΑΡΚΑΔΙΟΥ	Μ. Αρκαδίου	Arkádhi monastery
ΜΠΑΛΙ	Μπαλί	Balí
ΜΥΡΘΙΟΣ	Μύρθιος	Mírthios
ΠΕΡΑΜΑ	Πέραμα	Pérama
ΠΛΑΚΙΑΣ	Πλακιάς	Plakiás
ΠΡΕΒΕΛΙ	Πρέβελι	Préveli
ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟ	Ρέθυμνο	Réthimnon
ΣΠΗΛΙ	Σπίλι	Spíli
ΦΟΥΡΦΟΥΡΑΣ	Φουρφουράς	Fourfourás
ΨΗΛΟΡΕΙΤΗΣ	Ψηλορείτης	Psilorítis

Travel details

Buses

Some of these services are restricted on Sundays. For the latest timetables and fares visit KTEL's websites Ⓦwww.bus-service-crete-ktel.com or Ⓦwww.crete-buses.gr,

Ayía Galíni to: Festós (6 daily; 7.45am–4.30pm; 30min); Hóra Sfakíon (1 daily; 7am; 2hr 30min); Iráklion (8 daily; 7.45am–7pm; 2hr); Plakiás (3 daily; 6.30am, 9am & 2.30pm; 1hr 30min); Réthimnon (6 daily; 6.30am–6.15pm; 1hr 30min).

Plakiás to: Ayía Galíni (3 daily; 10.30am, 11.30am & 7pm; 1hr 30min); Hóra Sfakíon (1 daily; 9am; 1hr); Moní Préveli (1 daily; 11am; 20min); Réthimnon (8 daily; 7am–8.45pm; 45min).

Moní Préveli to: Plakiás (4 daily; 11.30am, 12.45pm, 5.30pm & 8.15pm; 20min); Réthimnon (4 daily; 11.30am, 12.45pm, 5.30pm & 8.15pm; 1hr).

Réthimnon to: Amári (3 daily; 1hr); Anóyia (2 daily; 5.30am & 2pm; 1hr 30min); Arkádhi (3 daily; 6.15am, 10.30am & 2.30pm; 50min); Ay. Galíni (6 daily; 5.30am–5pm; 1hr 30min); Haniá (19 daily; 6.15am–10.30pm; 1hr 30min–3hr); Iráklion (20 daily; 6.30am–10.15pm; 1hr 30min–2hr); Moní Préveli (4 daily; 10am, noon, 4.30pm & 7.30pm; 45min); Omalós (2 daily; 6.15 & 7am; 2hr 30min); Plakiás (7 daily; 6.15am–7.30pm; 45min); Spíli (7 daily; 5.30am–7.30pm; 40min).

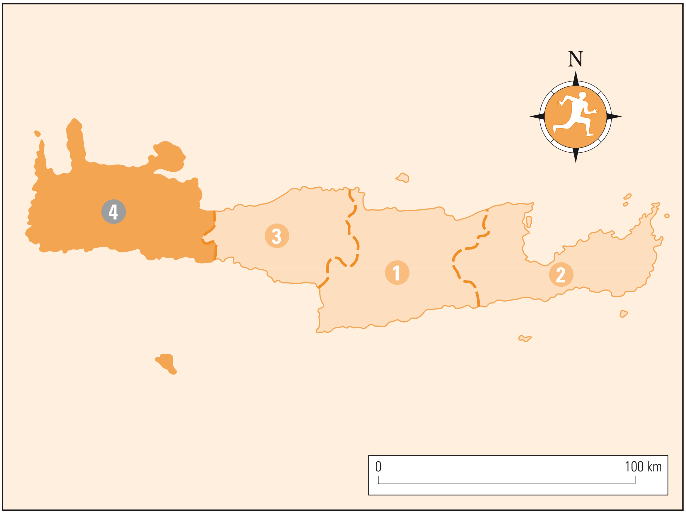
Ferries

For the latest information for domestic and international ferries, visit Ⓦwww.greekislands.gr or Ⓦwww.ferries.gr.

Réthimnon to: Pireás (currently Tues, Thurs & Sun at 8pm; 10hr); it is expected that a new ship will enter service in 2007 restoring daily sailings. Thíra (seasonal day-trips Tues & Sat). Also three-day cruises every Friday to Thíra, Kos & Bodrum (Turkey). Details on all these from Ellotia Tours (see p.248).

4

Haniá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CHAPTER 4

Highlights

- **Haniá** A fascinating old town set around a scenic harbour, with excellent accommodation and food as well as the region's best nightlife. **See p.298**

- **The White Mountains** Crete's most impressive mountains offer a huge range of hiking opportunities – the famous Samariá Gorge (p.347) is only one option. **See p.342**

- **Loutró** Still accessible only on foot or by boat, the tiny village of Loutró epitomizes the isolated appeal of the southwest coast. **See p.354**

- **Frangokástello** A stunning seaside castle with a backdrop of stark mountains. **See p.367**

- **Falásarna and Elafonísi** The isolated west coast boasts two of the island's finest beaches. **See p.376 & p.384**

- **The Enneachora** Touring the "Nine Villages" offers a spectacular drive through green, wooded countryside, circling back via a spectacular clifftop corniche. **See pp.379–82**

- **Byzantine churches** Ancient churches, many of them with remains of original frescoes, are found throughout the region, particularly in Sélinos. **See p.386**

- **Paleohóra** The only real resort in the southwest, with a great beach, lively atmosphere and an enjoyably end-of-the-road feel. **See p.386**

△ Omalós plain

4

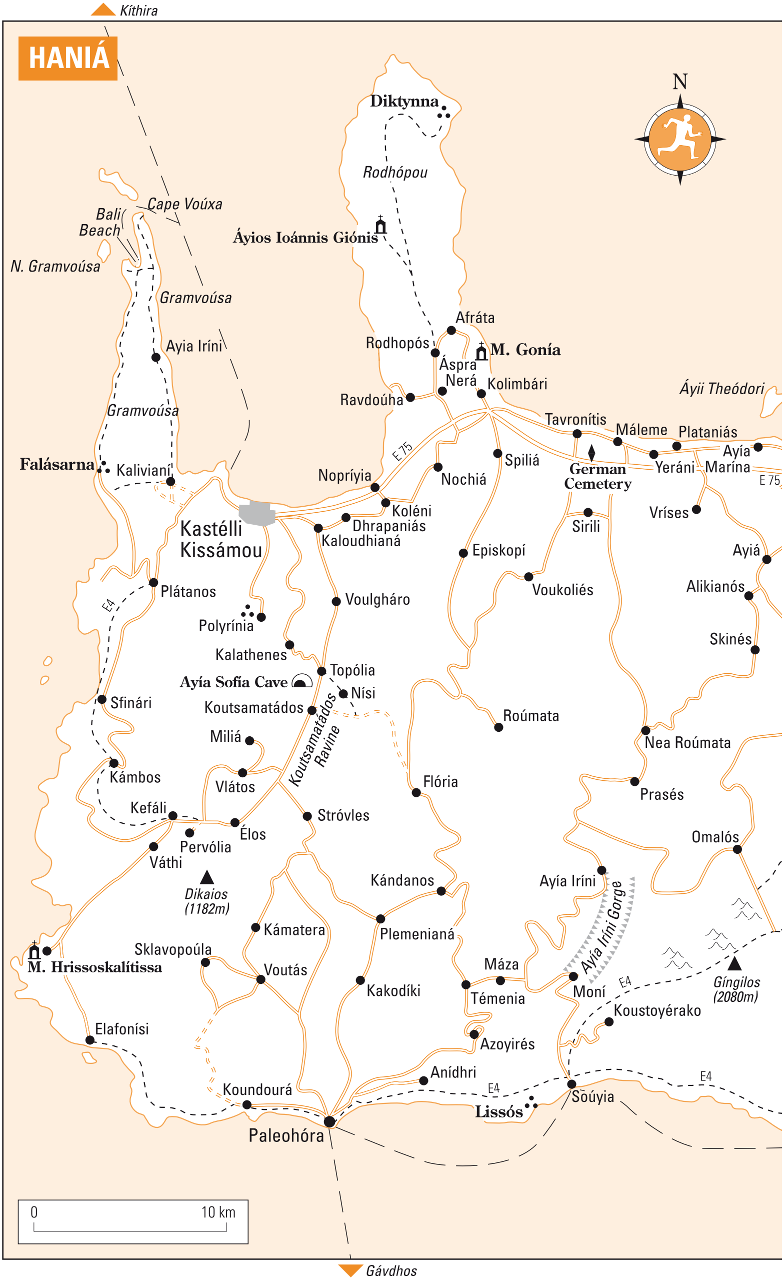
Haniá

Haniá, Crete's westernmost province, is still its least visited, which is a significant part of its attraction. Although tourist development is spreading fast, and has already covered much of the coast around the city of Haniá, the west is likely to remain one of the emptier parts of the island, partly because there are no large sand beaches to accommodate resort hotels, and partly because the great archeological sites are a long way from here. In their place are some of the most classic elements of the island: scattered coves, unexploited rural villages, and a spectacular vista of mountains.

The city of **Haniá**, island capital until 1971, is unequivocally the most enjoyable of Crete's larger towns. It is littered with oddments from its Venetian and Turkish past, and bustling with harbourside life. To either side, along virtually the whole **north coast** of the province, spreads a line of sandy beach – at times exposed, and increasingly developed, but still with numerous stretches where you can escape the crowds. The expanse of sand is broken by three peninsulas: **Akrotíri**, enclosing the magnificent natural harbour of the **Bay of Soúdha**; **Rodhópou**, a bare and roadless tract of mountain; and, at the western tip of the island, **Gramvoúsa**, uninhabited and entirely barren. Akrotíri is overshadowed by NATO (air bases and naval installations), but it's still worth a day-trip, with a couple of excellent beaches – **Stavrós** above all – and two beautiful monasteries. Most tourists stay to the west, on the coast between Haniá and Rodhópou, in one of a number of villages now joined together by a string of low-key development through **Ayía Marína** and **Plataniás**, with the villas and apartments thinning out as you head further from the city.

The south is overshadowed by the peaks of the **Lefká Óri** – the White Mountains – whose grey bulk, snowcapped from January through to June, dominates every view in western Crete. Although marginally less high and considerably less famous than the Psilorítis range, they're far more rewarding for walking or climbing. Along the south coast the mountains drop straight to the Libyan Sea and the few towns here lie in their shadow, clinging to what flat land can be found around the bays. Through the heart of the massif there's no road at all, nor is there any driveable route along the south coast: unless you want to travel back and forth across the island you'll have to rely on boats here, or on walking. The hike through the National Park in the **Samariá Gorge**, Europe's longest, is a stunning experience, despite the summer hordes. With a little spirit of adventure and preparation there are scores of other, deserted, **hiking** routes to take.

The south-coast communities beneath the mountains see plenty of visitors, mostly gorge-trippers passing through, but none could really be described as a resort. **Ayía Rouméli** and **Loutró** can be reached only on foot or by boat, although this hasn't prevented Ayía Rouméli, the end-point of the Samariá Gorge walk, from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Cape Voúxa
Bali Beach
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Ayia Iríni
Gramvoúsa
Afráta
Rodhopós
M. Gonía
Áspra Nerá
Kolimbári
Ravdoúha
Áyii Theódori
Tavronítis
Máleme
Plataniás
Ayía Marína
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Yeráni
German Cemetery
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Nochiá
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Falásarna
Kaliviani
Kastélli Kissámou
Koléni
Dhrapaniás
Kaloudhianá
Vríses
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Episkopí
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Polyrínia
Skinés
Kalathenes
Topólia
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Nísi
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Miliá
Nea Roúmata
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Vlátos
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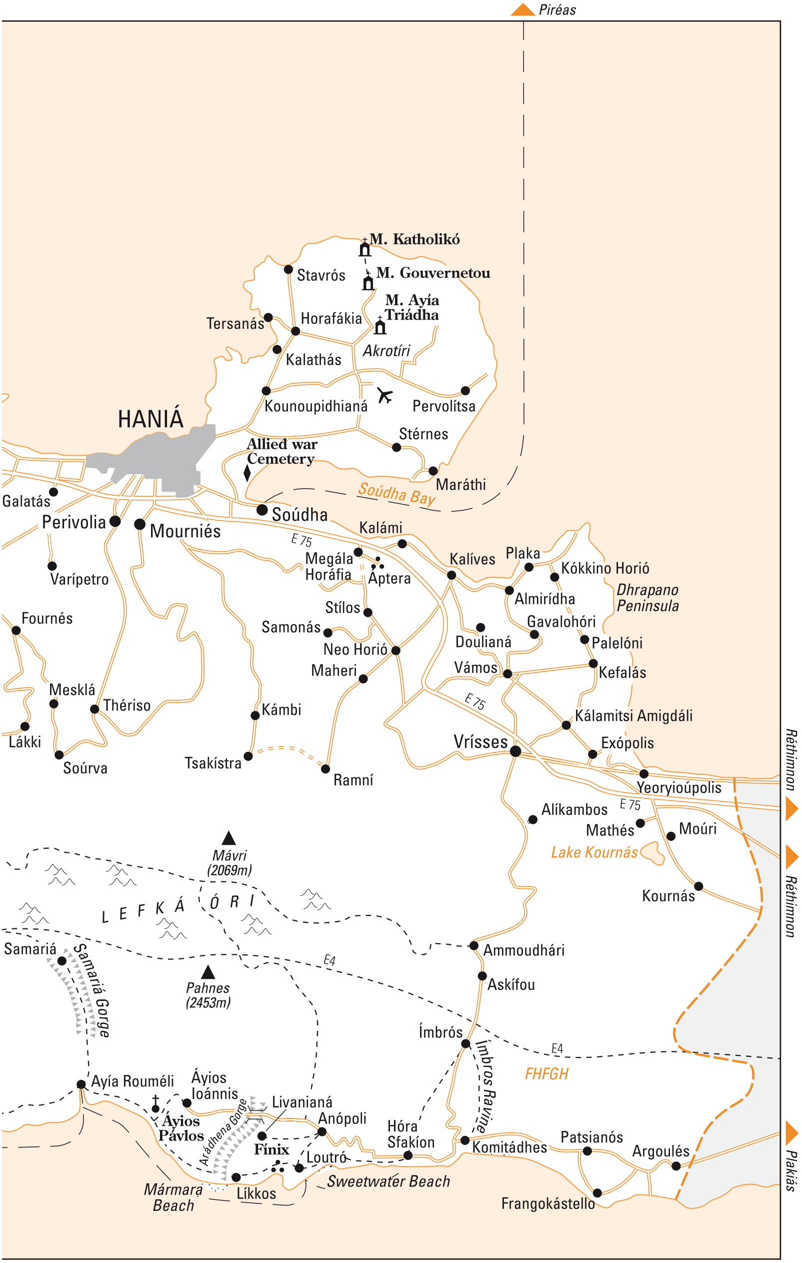
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Plaka
Kókkino Horió
Dhrapano Peninsula
Almirídha
Varípetro
Stílos
Samonás
Gavalohóri
Doulianá
Palelóni
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Áyios Pávlos
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Livanianá
Anópoli
Hóra Sfakíon
Fínix
Loutró
Komitádhes
Patsianós
Argoulés
Plakiás
Sweetwater Beach
Mármara Beach
Líkkos
Frangokástello

becoming crowded and somewhat overdeveloped; if you want somewhere serene to unwind after your exertions, Loutró is a much better bet. **Hóra Sfakíon**, the capital of the wild region known as Sfakiá, is a pleasant enough place to stay if you can handle the influx of day-trippers; far more peace is to be found down the coast a little, at the superb beaches by the Venetian castle of **Frangokástello**.

The west end of the island, beyond Rodhópou, is very sparsely populated. The port of **Kastélli** is the only town of any size, and there's a growing resort at **Paleohóra** in the south. **Soúyia** may be the next in line, but for the moment it seems in a rather charming state of limbo. The whole of the mountainous southwestern corner, an area known as **Sélinos**, is worth exploring, with rough roads leading to untouched mountain villages and little-known ruins and churches. On the west-facing coast – hard to get to but well worth the effort – are two of Crete's finest beaches, **Falásarna** and **Elafonísi**.

The north coast

With the city of **Haniá** as a base, getting around the **north coast** is easy enough: it's a heavily populated region with excellent roads and a stream of buses along the main routes. If you're dependent on public transport, trying to get off the beaten track presents more of a problem. On the **Rodhópou** peninsula, for example, there are no regular services at all and, while most inland villages are served by at least a couple of daily buses, it can be frustrating if you want to get to several in a day.

Renting a vehicle or motorcycle is a good investment, and there are plenty of outlets in Haniá and all the resorts. Remember, though, that this is mountainous country – the smaller mopeds are (more or less) all right for one person, but with two people on board they simply won't make it up many of the hills.

Haniá

HANIÁ, as any of its residents will tell you, is the spiritual capital of Crete, even if the political title is now officially bestowed on Iráklion's urban sprawl. With its shimmering waterfront, crumbling masonry and web of alleys, it is an extraordinarily attractive city, especially if you can catch it in spring when the Lefká Óri's snowcapped peaks seem to hover above the roofs. The permanent population – fast expanding into hill and coastal suburbs – always outnumbers the tourists, although in August visitors seem to run them pretty close. Haniá has plenty to fill a good day or two's sightseeing; highlights include the **Venetian harbours**, a quartet of **museums** dealing with archeological, naval, Byzantine and folklore themes, as well as plenty of Minoan ruins dotted throughout the old town. But the greatest pleasure of all, perhaps, is to be had wandering the narrow streets and stepped alleyways of the **old quarters**, filled with Venetian and Turkish architectural gems – vestiges of a time when the city was a jewel of the Mediterranean. Include plentiful accommodation and tavernas, excellent **markets**, stores and nightlife, and it all adds up to a city worth getting to know, and – once you've been seduced by its charms – where you'll almost certainly stay longer than you intended.

Some history

Haniá's modern history, in which it featured as a hotbed of nationalist sentiment under the Turks, as well as its proximity to the scene of most of the heavy fighting in the Battle of Crete, has left it with little in the way of monuments. Yet it's one of the longest continuously inhabited city sites anywhere in the world, and remains an enticing place to wander round, with odd reminders of the past at every pace and antiquities in the most unlikely settings.

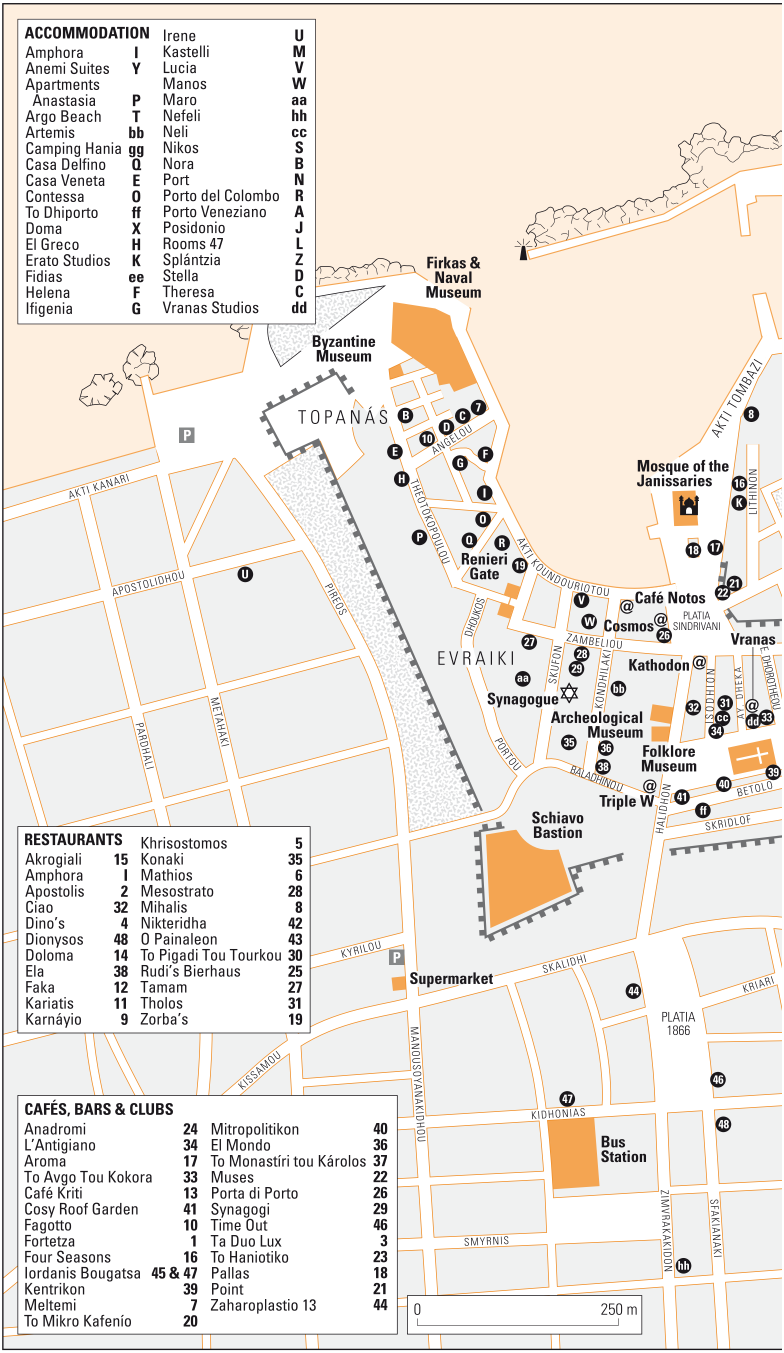
Under the name **Kydonia**, it was a **Minoan** community of obscure status: only scattered remnants have so far been brought to light, but many believe that there's a major palace still to be discovered somewhere in the vicinity, perhaps beneath modern buildings on the Kastélli hill overlooking the harbour, where Palatial-style architectural fragments and artefacts have been unearthed. After the collapse of the Minoan palace culture, it grew into one of the island's most important cities – well known enough for its citizens to warrant a mention in Homer's *Odyssey* – and remained so through the Classical Greek era. When **Rome** came in search of conquest, the city mounted a stiff resistance prior to its eventual capitulation in 69 BC, after which it flourished once more. The Kastélli hill served as the Roman city's acropolis, but dwellings spread at least as far as the extent of the walled city that can be seen today. Roman mosaics from this era have been discovered beneath the Cathedral Square and up near the present market.

In early **Christian** times Kydonia was the seat of a bishop, and under the protection of Byzantium the city flourished along with the island. As the Byzantine Empire became increasingly embattled, however, so its further outposts, Kydonia (and Crete) included, suffered neglect. Not much is heard of the place again until the thirteenth century, when the **Genoese** (with local support) seized the city from the Venetians and held it from 1263 to 1285.

When the **Venetians** finally won it back they acted quickly to strengthen the defences, turning the city – renamed **La Canea** – into a formidable bulwark. The city walls were built in two stages: in the fourteenth century Kastélli alone was fortified, and within these walls stood the original cathedral and the city administration; later, in the sixteenth century, new walls were constructed as a defence against constant raids by pirate corsairs – in particular against the systematic ravages of Barbarossa. It is these defences, along with the Venetian harbour installations, that define the shape of Haniá's old town today. Within the walls, meanwhile, a flourish of public and private construction left La Canea perhaps the island's most beautiful city.

In 1645, after a two-month siege with terrible losses (mostly on the Turkish side – their commander was executed on his return home for losing as many as forty thousand men), Haniá fell to the **Turks**. It was the first major Cretan stronghold to succumb, becoming the Turkish island capital and seat of the pasha. Churches were converted to mosques, the defences more or less maintained, and there must have been at least some building: today it is barely possible to distinguish Venetian buildings maintained by the Turks from originals of Venetian or Turkish workmanship.

For the rest, it is a history of struggle – for **independence** during the nineteenth century, then in **resistance** against the Germans in World War II. In the independence struggle campaign, the city's most dramatic moment came in 1897, following the outbreak of war between Greece and Turkey, when the Great Powers (Britain, France, Russia and Italy) imposed peace and stationed a joint force in the waters off Haniá – an event used to dramatic and comic effect by Kazantzákis


City beach, 15 & J
Plataniás, Kastélli & gg
Firkas & Naval Museum
Byzantine Museum
TOPANÁS
Mosque of the Janissaries
AKTI TOMBAZI
LITHINON
AKTI KANARI
ANGELOU
THEOTOKOPOULOU
Renieri Gate
AKTI KOUNDOURIOTOU
Café Notos
Cosmos
PLATIA SINDRIVANI
Vranas
APOSTOLIDHOU
PIREOS
DHOUKOS
EVRAIKI
ZAMBELIOU
SKUFON
KONDHILAKI
Kathodon
ISODHION
AY. DHEKA
E. DHOROTHEOU
Synagogue
Archeological Museum
Folklore Museum
PORTOU
BALADHINOU
Triple W
BETOLO
HALIDHON
SKRIDLOF
Schiavo Bastion
PARDHALI
METAHAKI
KYRILOU
Supermarket
SKALIDHI
KRIARI
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ACCOMMODATION			
Amphora	I	Irene	U
Anemi Suites	Y	Kastelli	M
Apartments Anastasia	P	Lucia	V
Argo Beach	T	Manos	W
Artemis	bb	Maro	aa
Camping Hania	gg	Nefeli	hh
Casa Delfino	Q	Neli	cc
Casa Veneta	E	Nikos	S
Contessa	O	Nora	B
To Dhiporto	ff	Port	N
Doma	X	Porto del Colombo	R
El Greco	H	Porto Veneziano	A
Erato Studios	K	Posidonio	J
Fidias	ee	Rooms 47	L
Helena	F	Splántzia	Z
Ifigenia	G	Stella	D
		Theresa	C
		Vranas Studios	dd

RESTAURANTS		Khrisostomos	5
Akrogiali	15	Konaki	35
Amphora	I	Mathios	6
Apostolis	2	Mesostrato	28
Ciao	32	Mihalis	8
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Dionysos	48	O Painaleon	43
Doloma	14	To Pigadi Tou Tourkou	30
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CAFÉS, BARS & CLUBS			
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Aroma	17	To Monastíri tou Károlos	37
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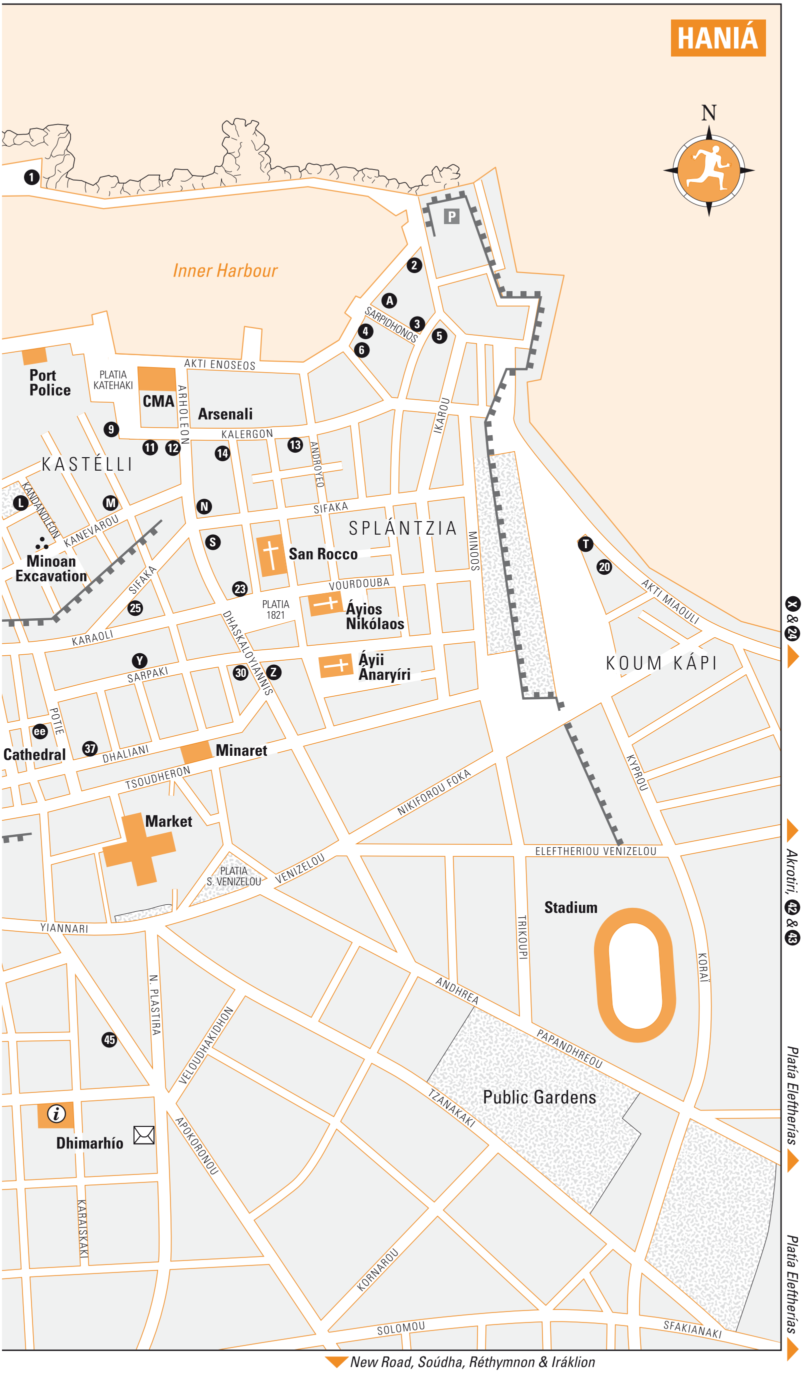
Iordanis Bougatsa	45 & 47	Pallas	18
Kentrikon	39	Point	21
Meltemi	7	Zaharoplastio 13	44
To Mikro Kafenío	20		


HANIÁ
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Inner Harbour
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P
SARPIDHONOS
AKTI ENOSEOS
Port Police
PLATIA KATEHAKI
CMA
ARHOLEON
Arsenali
KALERGON
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ANDROYEO
IKAROU
KASTÉLLI
KANDANOLEON
L
M
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KANEVAROU
Minoan Excavation
SIFAKA
SPLÁNTZIA
S
San Rocco
MINOOS
VOURDOUBA
23
25
PLATIA 1821
Áyios Nikólaos
DHASKALOYIANNIS
KARAOLI
Y
SARPAKI
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Áyii Anaryíri
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AKTI MIAOULI
KOUM KÁPI
POTIE
ee
37
Cathedral
DHALIANI
Minaret
TSOUDHERON
NIKIFOROU FOKA
KYPROU
Market
PLATIA S. VENIZELOU
VENIZELOU
ELEFTHERIOU VENIZELOU
YIANNARI
Stadium
TRIKOUPI
KORAÏ
N. PLASTIRA
ANDHREA
PAPANDHREOU
45
VELOUDHAKIDHON
TZANAKAKI
Public Gardens
APOKORONOU
Dhimarhío
KARAISKAKI
KORNAROU
SOLOMOU
SFAKIANAKI
X & 24
Akrotiri, 42 & 43
Platía Eleftherías
Platía Eleftherías
New Road, Soúdha, Réthymnon & Iráklion

in his novel *Zorba the Greek*. From here, in one famous incident, they bombarded Cretan insurgents attempting prematurely to raise the flag of Greece on the hill of Profítis Elías (see p.317). When the Turkish administrators were finally forced to leave, Prince George, the high commissioner chosen by the powers, established his capital here for the brief period of regency before Crete finally became part of the Greek state.

During **World War II**, with most of the German landings and the bulk of the fighting on the coast immediately west of the city, Haniá suffered severe bombardment, the destruction eventually compounded by a fire, which wiped out almost everything apart from the area around the harbour. In the final six months of their occupation of the island, the Germans withdrew to a heavily defended perimeter centred on the city. In the postwar period, the town was rebuilt, and sprawling, traffic-congested suburbs now encircle the ancient core.

The arrival of **tourism** has inspired the will – if not the resources – to save and restore much of the city's crumbling architectural heritage, and Haniá is currently enjoying a period of peace and prosperity unrivalled in its modern history.

Arrival and information

Arriving by **boat**, you'll anchor at the port and naval base of **Soúdha**, at the head of the magnificent Bay of Soúdha, 10km east of Haniá, an approach which offers unparalleled views of the Lefká Óri as you near the island. Fortunately there's no real need to stay in Soúdha, which is rather grubby, and **city buses** run approximately every fifteen minutes from there to Haniá's marketplace, although these can be swamped when the ferries arrive; the ferries are also met by intercity buses to Kastélli Kissámos, and Iráklion via Réthimnon. There are usually plenty of **taxis** waiting in the parking area right by the dock too (about €8 to Haniá). If you are stuck in Soúdha you'll find just about everything you need on the square right by the ferries: stores, a bank, a post office, a couple of bars and restaurants, and two inexpensive hotels.

Haniá's **airport** is about 15km northeast of the city, in the middle of the Akrotíri peninsula. There are only three local blue buses a day from here to the centre, so you'll probably need a taxi if you're not being picked up by a package-tour bus or hiring a car. Plentiful taxis meet the flights and the journey to Haniá costs about €15; the official prices to other popular destinations are listed at the rank. If you are driving, the route into Haniá is pretty clear, but look out for the poorly signed junction where you join the main road after about 3km – you don't have priority here. For all destinations other than the city, it's quicker and easier to take the left turn signed to Soúdha about 6km from the airport; this will take you down past the head of Soúdha Bay and out onto the main E75 highway, bypassing Haniá's congestion.

The **bus station** – with a left luggage facility – is south of the walls on Odhós Kidhonías, within easy walking distance of the centre.

Arriving by **car** can be a nightmare once you hit the harbour area and get tangled up in the one-way system and no-parking zones. As a car is near-useless inside the old walled city and distances are easily walkable anyway, the least stressful solution is to park outside the old town and walk in. Longer-term parking places can usually be found along Aktí Kanári to the west of the Naval Museum near the sea front, or on the sidestreets off Pireós leading down there, and to the north of the open-air theatre on the east side of the old town; there are also signposted pay car parks in the new town. Finding parking within the walls of the old town is almost impossible in high season – besides which many of the more attractive hotels simply can't be reached by car, though some of the bigger places will provide you with porter's trolleys. It's worth knowing that you are permitted to drive along the Aktí Koundouriótou waterfront **before 10am** (after which it is closed) – this is a handy way of transporting baggage to and from the many hotels in this zone. Otherwise you could opt to stay along Theotokopóulou, easily reached from the car park by the naval museum, or a little further out at a hotel with its own car park. Wherever you park make sure not to leave any valuables in the car.

Information

The very helpful **Municipal Tourist Office** is in the *Dhimarhío* (town hall) at Kidhonías 29 (Mon–Fri 8am–2.30pm; ⓣ28210 36155, ⓕ28210 36205), four blocks east of the bus station. They have timetables for buses, sites and museums across the island, as well as details of how to get to them, local trips, gorge walks and more; much of this is pinned up on the wall, so can be checked even when the tourist office itself is closed. There is also a sub-office at the **airport** (April–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–4pm; ⓣ28210-63880). For details of where to buy tickets for plane, bus or ferry departures, see "Listings" on pp.316–17.

Accommodation

There are thousands of **rooms to rent** in Haniá and, unusually, quite a few comfortable, elegant **boutique hotels**. Even so you may face a long search for a bed at the height of the season (especially in the first half of August). Perhaps the most desirable rooms – with prices to match – are those overlooking the **harbour**, west of Hálidhon, though some of those nearer the water can be noisy at night. The nicest of the more expensive places are here too, usually set back a little way and thus quieter, but often still with good views from upper storeys.

In the eastern half of the **old town** rooms are far more scattered, and tend to be cheaper. In the height of the season your chances of finding somewhere are much better over here. Immediately east of the harbour, reached via the alleys that lead north off Kaneváro, **Kastélli** has some lovely places with views, although they are very popular and often booked up. Another possibility is close to the **town beaches** at the east and west fringes, which are quiet and often pleasant. There's really not much reason to stay in the modern part of town, and the hotels are, with a couple of notable exceptions, uninspiring.

In the **addresses** below, Párodos means side street, so 2 Párodos Theotokopóulou, for example, is the second alley off Theotokopóulo. If you're having trouble finding somewhere, the tourist office has extensive lists and often knows where there are vacancies, or you could try the Rental Accommodations Union (Dorothéou Epískopou 20 ⓣ28210 43601, ⓦwww.west-crete-rooms.com), whose website has an online booking facility for over thirty rooms places in Haniá, plus dozens more across the province. Many places drop their **high season prices** outside August, some quite dramatically so; it's always worth enquiring.

Around the harbour: west of Hálidhon

Amphora 2 Párodos Theotokopóulou 20 ⓣ28210 93224, ⓦwww.amphora.gr. Hotel in a fourteenth-century Venetian building, beautifully renovated with some interesting features such as spiral staircases and four-poster beds. The balcony rooms (such as Room 20) with harbour view are the best value; the rooms without a view are slightly cheaper. ⑧

Apartments Anastasia Theotokopóulou 21 ⓣ28210 88001 or mobile ⓣ6972292643, ⓦwww.anastasia-apartments.com. Rooms and fully equipped apartments with TV in a couple of locations on this popular street. Rooms ③, apartments ④

Artemis Kondiláki 13 ⓣ & ⓕ28210 91196. A/c rooms with bath, fridge and TV plus use of kitchen in this touristy street running inland from Zambelíu. ④

Casa Delfino Theofánous 9 ⓣ28210 87400, ⓦwww.casadelfino.com. Completely over-the-top hotel offering big, deluxe suites with elegant decor, marble or polished-wood floors, satellite TV, dataports and Jacuzzis. High-season rates range from €185–€298. ⑨

Casa Veneta Theotokopóulou 57 ⓣ28210 90007, ⓕ28210 75931. Excellent-value a/c studios and apartments with kitchenette, TV and (some) balcony sea-views; the large duplex apartment is particularly pleasant. Helpful, friendly proprietor. ④–⑤

Contessa Theofánous 15 ⓣ28210 98566, ⓕ28210 98565. One of the first of the harbour hotels to be done up, and now showing its age a bit, but bags of character and harbour views from some rooms. All rooms with a/c, fridge and TV. Breakfast included. ④

El Greco Theotokopóulou 49 ⓣ28210 90432, ⓦwww.elgreco.gr. Comfortable modern hotel that merges into its surroundings. Tastefully furnished, rather small rooms come with a/c, TV and fridge; attractive roof garden with harbour view; breakfast (extra) available. ⑤

Helena A Párodos Theotokopóulou 14 ⓣ28210 95516 or mobile 6973321762. Charming small hotel in quiet street with pleasant, a/c balcony rooms with TV; some with views. ⑤

Ifigenia A. Gamba 21 ⓣ28210 94357, ⓦwww.ifigeniastudios.gr. Part of a small empire of rooms, studios and apartments at various prices, mostly elegantly decorated and well equipped (some with Jacuzzi), in old Venetian buildings. Another branch is at Theotokopóulou 15. ⑥–⑦

Lucia Aktí Koundouriótou ⓣ28210 90302, ⓦwww.ellada.net/loukia. Harbourfront hotel with balcony rooms. Not the prettiest place, but exceptional value for some of the best views in town, although the rooms at the back are less inviting. All with a/c and some (slightly pricier) with fridge and TV; rooms also come with double glazing which should ensure peace at night. ③–④

Manos Zambelíu 24 ⓣ28210 94156, ⓦwww.manoshotel.gr. Great location right on the harbour, though the more expensive balcony rooms on that side are inevitably noisy. All come with a/c, TV and fridge, and some have cooking facilities; there's also an Internet café downstairs. ⑤

Maro B Parodos Portou 5 ⓣ28210 54981. Probably the cheapest rooms in the old town, hidden away in a quiet, unmarked alley off Portou not far from the Schiavo Bastion. En-suite rooms come with a/c and fridge. Friendly and clean. ②

Nora Theotokopoúlou 60 ⓣ28210 72265, ⓔpensionnora@hotmail.com. Charming, simple rooms in an old wooden Turkish house, some with shared bath. Pleasant breakfast café below. ③

Porto del Colombo Theofánous and Moschón ⓣ28210 70945, ⓔcolompo@otenet.gr. Hotel occupying a grand, rather dark old mansion that the management claim was once the French Embassy and later home of Eleftheríos Venizélos. All rooms with TV, a/c and minibar. ⑦

Stella Angélou 10 ⓣ28210 73756. Creaky but charmingly eccentric old house with plain, clean, a/c, en-suite rooms with fridge above an eclectic gift shop. ③

Thereza Angélou 8 ⓣ28210 92798. Beautiful old pension in a great position with stunning views from its roof terrace and some rooms; classy decor too. More expensive than its neighbours but deservedly so – book ahead in high season. ④–⑤

The old city: east of Hálidhon

Anemi Suites Sarpáki 41 ⓣ28210 53001, ⓔanemi@cha.forthnet.gr. Inviting one- and two-room apartments inside a restored Turkish wooden house; all are a/c with a kitchen and sleep up to four depending on size. Prices vary, but the cheapest (No. 4) with a superb terrace is the one to go for. ⑥–⑦

To Dhiporto Betólo 41 ⓣ28210 40570, ⓦwww.todiporto.gr. The "Two Doors" runs between Betólo and pedestrian Skridhlóf streets: the balcony rooms over the latter, especially, are quiet. Friendly and good value, with a/c, TV, fridge and coffee machine in the rooms. ③–④

Erato Studios Lithinón 17 ⓣ2310 692378. Stunning location with balconies overlooking the harbour from high on its eastern edge justifies the price of these two- and three-bed studios equipped with a/c, TV and small kitchen. ⑤–⑦

Fidias Sarpáki 8 ⓣ28210 52494. Signposted from the cathedral. This favourite backpackers' meeting place has recently been done up to improve facilities and add some remarkably low-priced en-suites and facilities, including some small kitchens. Still cheap and cheerful, though, with the real advantage of offering single rooms or arranging shares in three- or four-bed rooms, which are the cheapest beds in town (€8–10). ①–②

Kasteli Kaneváro 39 ⓣ28210 57057, ⓦwww.kastelistudios.gr. Comfortable, modern, reasonably priced pension and very quiet at the back. All en-suite rooms come with a/c, fridge and anti-mosquito machines. The proprietor is exceptionally helpful and also has a few apartments (④) and a couple of beautiful houses nearby (for up to five people) to rent. Own car park. ②

Neli Isódhion 21–23 ⓣ28210 55533, ⓦwww.nelistudios.com. Larger and fancier than it appears from outside, this hotel rambles through three lovingly restored old buildings, with stylishly decorated, fully equipped rooms with balconies, a/c and cooking facilities. ⑦

Nikos Dhaskaloyiánnis 63 ⓣ28210 54783. Built directly on top of a Minoan ruin – visible through a basement window as you enter – with a beautiful and rare 3500-year-old painted pillar. Good-value, relatively modern rooms, all with a/c, shower, fridge and kitchenette. Has a branch over the road with cheaper rooms, and there are several others nearby on this street. ②–③

Port Sífaka 73 ⓣ28210 59484, ⓔlioliosk@chania.cci.gr. Pleasant a/c rooms with bath and balcony, some overlooking a quiet garden. ③

Porto Veneziano Overlooking the Venetian harbour ⓣ28210 27100, ⓦwww.portoveneziano.gr. The plushest hotel on the east side of the old town is now part of the Best Western chain. Very comfortable, if bland, rooms with balcony views over the harbour. ⑧ with breakfast.

Rooms 47 Kandanoléon 47 ⓣ28210 53243. Quiet, traditional and simple rooms place on a street leading up from Kaneváro into Kastélli. Some rooms have balconies with fantastic sea views. ②–③

Splantzia Daskalogianni 20 ⓣ28210 45313, einfo@splanzia.com. Very attractive and friendly new hotel (taking its name from the old Turkish quarter) in an elegantly refurbished Venetian mansion, with stylish rooms (some with four-poster beds draped with mosquito nets). Breakfast is included and served in a pretty courtyard at the rear. Outside August prices fall by twenty percent. ⑦

Vranas Studios Ayíon Dhéka and Kalinákou Sarpáki, near the cathedral ⓣ28210 58618, ⓦwww.vranas.gr. Attractive, spacious balcony studio rooms with a/c, TV and kitchenette. Has recently added an extension in another Venetian building along the street with more excellent rooms. Outside August prices fall by thirty percent. ⑤

The modern city

Argo Beach Aktí Míaouli 1 ⓣ28210 40980, ⓕ28210 86303. Charming and good-value old-style hotel in the Koum Kápi quarter offering a/c, en-suite, sea-view balcony rooms with TV; noise from nearby late-night bars is offset by double glazing. Has own car park. ④

Doma Venizélou 124, on the sea front 300m east off our map ⓣ08210 51772, ⓕ08210 41578. Elegant hotel with a fascinating history inside a late nineteenth-century edifice that once served as the Austrian Embassy and later the British consulate until it was taken over by the Germans during World War II. The house has many original features including a serene patio garden, and both breakfast (which is included) room and bedrooms have fine sea views. Easy on-street parking nearby. ⑧

Irene Apostolídhou 9 ⓣ28210 89075, ⓕ28210 94668. Big, white modern hotel with fully-equipped rooms – balconies on the upper levels have sea views. Easy parking outside and not far to walk to the harbour or the town beach. ⑦

Nefeli Zimvrakákidon 47 ⓣ28210 70007, ⓕ28210 90855. Decent-value modern business hotel with pristine a/c balcony rooms equipped with TV and minibar. Parking nearby, and handy for the bus station. ⑥ with breakfast.

Posidonio Moní Gonías 57, corner of Aktí Papanikóli ⓣ28210 87404. Modern hotel right at the end of the beachfront road, behind the town beach. The rooms are a bit faded, but big, with fridge and a/c (for extra charge) – all in all a good deal for seafront location and easy parking. ④

Campsite

Camping Hania ⓣ28210 31138, behind the beach in Áyii Apóstoli, 4km west of Haniá. A rather small site, hemmed in by new development, but it has a pool and all the facilities just a short walk from some of the better beaches. It's just about within walking distance of Haniá if you follow the coast around, but more easily reached by taking the local bus (see p.311): a large sign tells you where to get off – from here walk down towards the sea for about five minutes.

The City

Haniá's **old city** clusters around the harbour, and most tourists rightly confine themselves to this area or the fringes of the new town up towards the bus station. You may get lost wandering among the narrow alleys, but it's never far to the sea, to one of the main thoroughfares or to some other recognizable landmark. The best way to get around the city is to walk, but the terminus for most **city buses**, especially those heading west, is at Platía 1866 just south of the walls; for Soúdha and the eastern side of town you may find it easier to get on at one of the stops by the market.

Hálidhon is perhaps the most commercially touristy street in Haniá, and the major junction at the inland end of the street marks the centre of town as much as anywhere does. If you stand facing north at this junction, everything in front and below you is basically the old, walled city; behind and to either side lie the newer parts. To the east, **Odhós Yiánnari** leads past the market and, if you follow it round, either to the main coast road or out onto the Akrotíri peninsula. To the west of the junction, **Skalídhi** leads eventually out of town towards Kastélli Kissámou. Ahead of you, Hálidhon descends to the **harbour** and into the heart of the old town. Much of your **shopping** and other business will take place around the meeting of old and new represented by this main Hálidhon junction: here and down towards the market you'll find pharmacies, newspaper stores, photographic shops and banks. The major thoroughfares heading south off Yiánnari – Apokorónou, Tzanakáki and Papandreou – represent modern Haniá, full of clothes and furniture stores, car rental places and more banks.

Along Hálidhon

From the main Hálidhon junction, head north (and down), taking the first left to walk down beside a high stretch of wall into the vicinity of the **Schiavo Bastion**. There's not a great deal to see here, but it's strange to find yourself so suddenly out of the crowds and among the scruffy yards and inquisitive dogs of the backstreets. A little further down Hálidhon, the considerably more interesting and animated **Odhós Skridlóf** joins from the right. Here, traditionally, leathermakers plied their trade, and although many shops are now geared to tourists and given over to beach towels and souvenirs, prices for leatherware – sandals, bags and the like – remain the best in Crete.

Just below Skridlóf, the **Cathedral** is set back from the road, presiding over a small square. Given Haniá's history and importance, you might expect this to be rather impressive. In fact, it's a modest building with little architectural merit, dating only from the 1860s. The square, though, Platía Mitropóleos, has seen a revival in recent years and is now surrounded by cafés with outdoor tables – more peaceful if you head round to the back of the Cathedral. Around 1770, the rebel Dhaskaloyiánnis (see p.360) was tortured to death here. On Hálidhon immediately below the square, you can see the ramshackle domes of a former Turkish bath: this has now been converted into a fashion store, Hamam, and it's worth taking a quick look inside.

Almost opposite is Haniá's **Archeological Museum** (Mon 1–7.30pm; Tues–Sun 8am–7.30pm; €2, €3 for combined ticket with Byzantine Collection, see opposite), housed in the Venetian-built church of San Francesco. Though it doesn't look like much now, with its campanile gone and a crumbling facade, this building was once one of the island's grandest. Inside, where there has been substantial restoration, you get a better sense of its former importance. The Turks converted the church into a mosque, from which a beautiful fountain and the base of a minaret have survived in the pungent, flowery garden alongside. Dominating the front part of the museum are large quantities of **Minoan pottery**, including a few of the huge storage jars or *píthoi*. In the centre is a collection of Minoan clay coffins (*lárnakes*), some wonderfully decorated, and one still containing two small skeletons. For archeologists, the most significant items are the **inscribed tablets** excavated in Kastélli: this is the only place other than Knossós where examples of Linear A and Linear B script have been found together and is regarded as further evidence supporting the existence of a palace here. Towards the back of the church, the collection is arranged chronologically, progressing through a large group of Classical **sculptures**, a case full of Greco-Roman **glassware** and some third-century Roman **mosaics** reassembled on the floor. The latter are truly lovely, particularly those of Dionysos and Ariadne and of Poseidon and Anemone. Outside in the garden courtyard are other assorted sculptures and architectural remnants, including a charming one-legged, headless lion.

Almost next door to the Archeological Museum, signed down a narrow alley, the **Cretan House Folklore Museum** (Mon–Sat 9am–3pm & 6–9pm; €2) is a charming, cluttered collection of artefacts, tapestries and traditional crafts equipment set out in a replica of a "traditional" house (though few can have been quite so packed). Embroidered cloths and tapestries made on the premises are offered for sale. On your way out, take a look at Haniá's elegant **Roman Catholic church** in the same courtyard, an interesting contrast to Orthodox churches.

Around the outer harbour

Hálidhon ends at a square by the harbour – officially called Platía Sindriváni, but known by everyone simply as **Harbour Square**. To the left, Aktí Koundouriótou circles around the outer harbour, crowded with outdoor cafés and tavernas. The focal point of an old Turkish quarter known as **Topanás**, the **harbour** comes into its own at night, when the lights from bars and restaurants reflect in the water and the animated crowds – locals as much as tourists – parade in a ritualistic volta of apparently perpetual motion. Stalls set up on the waterside sell everything from seashells to henna tattoos, and buskers serenade the passers-by. By day, especially in the hot, dozy mid-afternoon, it can be less appealing – often deserted and with the occasional whiff of decay from the rubbish washing up against the quayside.

This is the **outer harbour**, and the hefty bastion at the far end houses Crete's **Naval Museum** (daily 9am–4pm; €2.50). Although largely of specialist interest, the enthusiasm here is infectious, and the model ships, maquettes of the town in Venetian times, old maps and working exhibits like the old harbour light are hard to resist. One entire room is devoted to seashells and sea creatures. Upstairs a rather duller collection of marine instruments and photos of warships is enlivened by the entire bridge of a destroyer set up in its midst, and there's also an exhibition on the **Battle of Crete** of 1941. This is small and not terribly well displayed or labelled, but the frequently shocking images convey a real sense of the sufferings of the villagers of the province at the hands of the Nazis. Whether visiting the museum or not, it's worth going through the main gate (usually open in daylight hours) to visit the compound of the small naval garrison. Here you can climb onto the recently renovated seaward fortifications of the **Fírkas**, as this part of the city defences is known. It was on this spot that the modern Greek flag was first raised on Crete – in 1913 – and there are fine sea views.

Carrying on round the outside of the Fírkas, which has also been well restored, you can peer through loopholes at the great vaulted chambers within. On the far side, there's a car park (the starting point for the "Little Train" tours of the new town), and you can follow the sea wall round towards the town beach. Turn inland, though, and you reach the **Byzantine and post-Byzantine Collection** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; €2, €3 for combined ticket with Archeological Museum), located in the small Venetian chapel of San Salvatore at the bottom of Theotokopóulou. The beautifully displayed collection of mosaics, icons, jewellery, coins, sculpture and everyday objects is tiny, but gives a fascinating insight into an era that's largely overlooked: it covers the entire period from early Christian to the end of the Venetian occupation in the seventeenth century.

Beyond the museum, Pireós cuts inland outside the best-preserved stretch of the **city walls**. Following them around on the inside is rather trickier, but far more enjoyable. This is where you'll stumble on some of the most picturesque little alleyways and finest Venetian houses in Haniá, and also where the pace of renovation and gentrification is most rapid. Keep your eyes open for details on the houses, such as old wooden balconies or stone coats of arms. The arch of the **Renieri Gate**, at the bottom of Moschón, is particularly elegant. There are also lots of interesting art and craft stores around here, along Theotokopóulou and the many alleys that run off it down towards the harbour.

Between the Renieri Gate and Hálidhon are more such streets and alleys, though here the emphasis is more on tavernas, bars and cafés: Kóndilaki is one of the busiest. This area was the medieval Jewish ghetto (the quarter is still officially known as Evraiki), and signed at the end of a small alley off the west side of Kóndilaki is Haniá's fifteenth-century Etz Hayyim **synagogue** (daily 10am–8pm; free), renovated by a fraternity of local Christians, Muslims and Jews after falling into a ruinous state. All but one of the city's Jews were rounded up by the Nazi occupation forces in 1944 and shipped off to Auschwitz, but they met their end (along with around five hundred members of the captured Cretan resistance) when their transport ship was torpedoed by a British submarine off the island of Mílos. The synagogue is entered through the original Venetian doorway and its garden, *mikveh* (purification fountain), reconstructed interior and *bimah* (speakers' platform) have been sensitively restored with the aid of public donations. The names of the 276 Jews who perished in the transport ship are remembered on a plaque in a small garden cemetery at the rear.

The inner harbour

North from Harbour Square, the curious, domed profile of the **Mosque of the Janissaries** (aka Hassan Pasha mosque) dominates the view. Built in 1645, the year Haniá fell to the Turks, it is the oldest Ottoman building on the island, and has been well restored – apart from the jarring concrete dome. The future use of the building is uncertain, though there are plans to demolish the unsightly outbuildings at the back. Meantime, aside from occasional exhibitions, you may not be able to get in: if you do, the main feature is the **mihrab** (a niche indicating the direction of Mecca) complete with Koranic inscription.

The harbourfront Aktí Tombázi curves round to the right to the **inner harbour**, where pleasure boats, private yachts and small fishing vessels are moored, and where sixteenth-century Venetian arsenals look out towards the breakwater alongside a cluster of restaurants and bars. Many of the arched **Arsenali** are still in a ruinous state, but others have been sensitively restored: one, the sixteenth-century Great Arsenal, is occupied by the **Center for Mediterranean Architecture** (CMA), with offices, a café and a glitzy space for temporary exhibitions (times and fees vary). In another, at the extreme eastern end of the harbour, a fifteenth-century BC **Minoan ship** (the "*Minoa*") has been reconstructed and is on display as part of an exhibition of ancient navigation. Prior to the start of the Olympics in 2004 the *Minoa* made a voyage to Athens carrying an olive branch from the oldest olive tree in Greece at Áno Vouves (see p.341) from which the first and last victors' olive wreaths were fashioned. Continuing round, you can follow the sea wall as far as the minaret-style **lighthouse**, en-route to where there's a bar (the *Forteza*) and an excellent view back over the city. You could then take the bar's all-day (free) shuttle ferry back to the south side of the harbour. At the eastern end of the inner harbour there are more signs of regeneration and refurbishment, and this is now a fashionable part of town. Aktí Miaoúli, following the shore eastwards beyond the city walls, is packed at night with bars and cafés, mostly frequented by young locals. Behind the harbour, though, the streets are still pretty run down, and in some ways the most atmospheric in the old town.

Kastélli

The bluff that rises behind the mosque and the inner harbour, known as **Kastélli**, was the site of the earliest habitation in Haniá. Favoured from earliest times for its defensive qualities, this little hill takes its name from a fortress that originally dated from the Byzantine era. Later it was the centre of the Venetian and of the Turkish towns, but very little survived a heavy bombardment during World War II.

Walking up Kaneváro from the Harbour Square you'll pass various remains, including a couple of fenced-off sites where **Minoan Kydonia** is being excavated. Swedish archeologists have traced the outline of a substantial building engulfed by a violent fire about 1450 BC, similar to that which destroyed Knossós. Many believe that this is the **palace** long thought to have existed here and, if so, it would complete a pattern across the island. It was later rebuilt after the fire and, given its proximity to the mainland, may well have been the focus of Mycenaean power on Crete. Among pottery finds here were some dating back to the Neolithic era, but the greatest prize uncovered was an archive of clay tablets bearing Minoan Linear A script (see p.416), the first to be found so far west in Crete. All around this area are various **trial excavations**, usually on vacant lots between existing houses, revealing further tantalizing glimpses of the substantial Minoan conurbation which lies beneath the modern town, and there are plans for much more extensive excavations once all the relevant property has been acquired. The alleys up to the left, onto the rise, end up going nowhere, but it's worth looking up here for the traces of the old city that survive, and tantalising glimpses of the views that the old buildings afford. Lithinón, for example, has various Venetian doorways and inscriptions and, at the top, a fine old archway beyond which the rather derelict hill-top area allows fine **views** over the harbour and out to sea.

Splántzia

Inland from Kastélli, you can head through the backstreets towards the **market**. As you wander round these streets, a **minaret** keeps appearing above the rooftops, only to disappear when you head towards it: actually located on Dhaliáni, it seems to be part of a carpenter's workshop, but is fenced off and closed to visitors.

A second **minaret** (this one missing its top) adorns the church of Áyios Nikólaos in the tranquil **Platía 1821**, further over to the east. Built by the Venetians, the church was converted to a mosque under Sultan Ibrahim and reconverted after Crete's reversion to Greek authority, but has been so often refurbished that there's nothing much to see. The square itself – whose name recalls the date of one of the larger rebellions against Turkish authority, following which an Orthodox bishop was hanged here – is another pleasantly shaded space set with café chairs. Nearby are two more old churches: San Rocco, just a few metres towards the harbour, is small and old-fashioned, while Áyii Anáryiri, which retained its Orthodox status throughout the Turkish occupation, has some very ancient icons. This zone, still known by its Turkish name **Splántzia**, is full of unexpected architectural delights, with carved wooden balconies and houses arching across the street at first-floor level. Many of the streets between here and the inner harbour have recently been recobbled and generally refurbished, and they're among the most atmospheric and tranquil in the old town. To the south east of Splántzia and outside the walls lies the **Koum Kápi** quarter (from the Turkish "Beach Gate") which over recent years has been transformed into a nightlife zone filled with snazzy bars and tavernas popular at night with younger *haniotes*.

The new town

Modern Haniá sprawls in every direction, encircling the old town. With time on your hands, there are parts that are worth the walk. Starting from in front of the **market**, the areas to the southwest, on the way to **Platía 1866** and the bus station, have an attractively old-fashioned commercialism about them, full of general stores stocking life's essentials rather than the tourist tat much favoured by shops within the city walls.

△ Leather market, Haniá

Heading southeast from the market, Tzanakáki leads to places of more specific interest. First of these is the **Public Gardens**, a few hundred metres up on the left. Laid out by a Turkish pasha in the nineteenth century, they include a few caged animals (not really enough to call a zoo, but there are *kri-kri*, ponies, loud monkeys and birds), a café where you can sit under the trees and a children's play area. The open-air auditorium is often used as a cinema, and is also the setting for local ceremonies and folklore displays, which can be enjoyable – look in to see what's on.

Carry on down the street, then take the second left onto Sfakianáki and you come to the **Historical Museum and Archives** (Mon–Fri 9am–1pm; free), which consists of a couple of gloomy rooms in a small and undistinguished grey building, with poorly labelled photos, a few revolutionary arms from the struggle against the Turks and relics of Venizélos, and many more rooms filled with musty papers and books.

At the end of Sfakianáki, about 500m southeast of the Public Gardens, is **Platía Eleftherías**, with a statue of Venizélos in the centre and an imposing court building along the south side. This court house was originally the government building of Prince George's short-lived administration (see p.425). From here Odhós Papandreou (still the former Dhimokratías on many maps, which was renamed after Greece's recently deceased former prime minister) leads back to the centre, running past the rear of the Public Gardens and ending opposite the market again. Alternatively, you can follow **Iróon Politehníou**, which runs due north from Platía Eleftherías down to the sea. A broad avenue divided by trees and lined with large houses, interspersed with several expensive garden restaurants and a number of fashionable café-bars where you can sit outdoors, it makes for an interesting walk in a part of the city very different from that dominated by the tourist crowds of Hálidhon.

The beaches

Haniá's closest **beaches** lie in a string to the west of the city. You can walk to the city beach, or the **bus** for those further afield leaves from the east side of Platía 1866, heading west along the old coast road (#21, about every 20min 8am–10.30pm; €0.75).

The city beach at **Néa Hóra** is about a ten-minute walk from the harbour, round past the Fírkas and on by the city's open-air swimming pool and a small fishing-boat harbour. At Néa Hóra there's clean sand and sheltered water, showers, and usually crowds of people. Cafés and restaurants line the sea front, among them an outstanding fish taverna, *Akrogiali* (see p.313). Offshore is a tiny islet with a sandy beach large enough for about five people at a time, but it's an unnervingly long swim – it's better to rent a pedalo or canoe if you want to explore.

If you continue west you can walk – for some twenty minutes – over a stony, scrubby stretch of sand with plenty of signs of new development, to **Áyii Apóstoli**. Here there's a good long stretch of yellow sand, the city's campsite and a much more established, if low-key, cluster of development. The only drawback (as at most of these beaches) is the crashing breakers, which can become vicious at times. At the end of Apóstoli's beach a barbed-wire fence attempts to prevent you getting onto the next section, but if you want to continue on foot it's worth clambering over the rocks: going round to the road involves a long detour and something of a climb over a low hill. At the next section, known as **Hrissí Aktí** (Golden Beach), there's more good sand which has attracted the apartment-builders. But it's not yet overcrowded, has a good taverna and is popular with locals. If you're on the bus, it detours via these beaches: they're also signed (poorly) from the main road. There's quite a bit of new development around, mostly apartments but also a number of **restaurants** – *Jetée*, to which you'll see signs, is good, if a little pricier than most. At the far end, as the beach curves round to a little headland, another taverna is set out on stilts over the water.

Beyond the Golden Beach headland lies a tiny sand cove, another small promontory, and then the long curve of **Oasis Beach** running on round to **Kalamáki**. This is crowded and justly so – the swimming is probably the best in the area, with a gently shelving sandy bottom and a fossil-covered (and very sharp) rocky islet/reef that fends off the bigger waves. There's also a string of cafés and tavernas, and other facilities including windsurf rental and lessons. Kalamáki is the furthest beach accessible by city bus, and it's right by the road. To walk this far would probably take a little over an hour nonstop, but it makes far more sense to dawdle and enjoy the less busy beaches along the way, arriving at Kalamáki in time to get the bus back.

Shopping

East along Yiánnari from the main Hálidhon junction – also reached from up behind the Cathedral at the end of the leather-workers' street Skridlóf – is the **market**, an imposing and rather beautiful cross-shaped structure which dates from around 1900. In full swing it's a wonderful kaleidoscope of bustle and colour, and there are some good souvenirs to be had among the stalls of meat and fish and veg. At the back is a small shaded square where locals sit outside a couple of *kafenía*. On **Saturday mornings** there's a fabulous line of market stalls along Minöos, inside the eastern city wall, where local farmers come to sell their produce. More epicurean delights are to be found at the friendly Bakalogatos, Kidhonías 42, almost opposite the Dhimarhío and tourist office; as well as a great selection of the island's wines and cheeses the **delicatessen** also stocks olive oil, cured meats, honey and (in case you're running low) Havana cigars.

Stores aimed at tourists are mainly found in the old town, especially **jewellery** and **souvenirs** on Hálidhon and all around the harbour. The **leather** goods on Skridlóf are excellent value. At Potié 51, Mat sells nothing but **chess** and *távli* sets in all shapes and sizes. Other interesting places to look include Saita, on Sarpáki close to the *Fidias* pension, which stocks traditional Cretan tapestries, **embroidery** and lace. Just east of here along Sífaka the shops of Haniá's cutlers will sell you traditional **Cretan knives** with goat-horn handles or even something less lethal for the kitchen. The various arty-crafty stores around the harbour on Kaneváro, Zambelíu, Kondiláki and Theotokopóulou are also worth a browse: Roka Carpets at Zambelíu 61 has wonderful traditional **weaving**, and an in-store loom. A good **photographic** shop is Eyeland, Dhaskaloyiánnis 63, near Platía 1821.

English and other foreign-language **newspapers** are sold at two places on Odhós Skalídhi and Odhós Yiánnari, slightly east and west of the top of Hálidhon at the junction with Platía 1866: one, NewsStand, lies right by the corner, while the other, towards the market, is next to the Commercial Bank. NewsStand also has a decent selection of English-language **books**, guides and maps as has Bibliopoleio Mediterraneo, on the Aktí Koundouriótou waterfront near the entrance to the Naval Museum. There's a more limited range at Pelekanakis, near the top of Hálidhon, and Petraki, Yiánnari 68. Paxari, an expat-run secondhand store at Dhaskaloyiánnis 46, opposite Sarpáki, has piles of English books as well as a noticeboard which often has offers of work and long-term rentals.

Eating and drinking

Evenings in Haniá for most visitors centre around the harbour, and you need not stray far from the waterfront to find a cocktail before **dinner**, a meal, a late-night **bar** and an all-night disco or **club**. Be warned, though, that these places tend to be pricey, and the quality at many leaves a lot to be desired. The most fashionable waterfront area these days, particularly with locals, is towards the far end of the inner harbour, around Sarpidónos spreading east into the Koum Kápi quarter. Away from the water, there are plenty of attractive, slightly cheaper possibilities on (among others) Kondiláki, Kanevárou and most of the streets off Halídhon, some of them in restored or partially restored ancient buildings.

Tavernas and restaurants

For eating by the waterfront, Platía Sindriváni (Harbour Square) is the obvious starting-point of the tavernas and cafés that fan out from here. Some are thoroughly touristy – employing irritating greeters to try and lure you in – but even among these there are plenty of places serving decent food too: a very extensive menu, and lots of western food, is generally a bad sign. Places in from the water are usually a little cheaper, but striking out a little further afield can take you off the tourist trail altogether: the more local restaurants to the east and west of the centre can make a refreshing change from the brashness of the harbourfront.

Akrogiali Aktí Papanikoli 19, on the Néa Hóra sea front ☎28210 73110. It's worth the walk or short taxi ride to this excellent, reasonably priced sea-front fish taverna where, despite a change of ownership, standards remain high. Friendly service, a pleasant seaside terrace and outstanding seafood ensure it's always packed with locals, so may be worth booking – though there are plenty of alternatives along the same stretch including *Katofli* (No.13) and *Ouzythino* (No. 6).

Amphora Aktí Koundouriótou, outer harbour. The restaurant of the hotel of the same name (restaurant entrance on the harbour) is one of the best on this strip, and serves good fish and a range of Cretan specialities with no hard sell.

Apostolis Aktí Enóseos 6 & 10, inner harbour ☎28210 43470. The fish tavernas at the inner end of the harbour are rated much higher by locals than those further round – some locals claim *Apostolis 2*, practically the last, and just a couple of doors down from its seemingly identical sister restaurant, is the best of all. The fish is excellent, but pricey.

Ciao Hálidhon 21. Inexpensive, fast-food-style pasta and pizza restaurant with soft play area for kids. No atmosphere, but great pizza from wood-fired oven.

Dino's Inner harbour by bottom of Sarpidónos. Another good bet for a seafood meal on the inner harbour.

Dionysos Sfakianaki 11, south of Platía 1866 and close to the bus station. Pleasant little workers' *estiatorio* serving up ready-made dishes from which you choose. Tasty specials are *yemista* (stuffed peppers) and *fava* (split-pea puree) as well as stewed lamb and goat meats.

Doloma Karsokalyvon 5, near the Arsenali. Excellent little taverna with a nice terrace serving well-prepared and economical Cretan dishes.

Ela Top of Kondiláki. Standard taverna food in an attractive roofless ruin, often with live Greek music to enliven your meal.

Faka Arholeon, back from the inner harbour. No views, but good, traditional food – ask what's recommended, as there are often seasonal dishes not on the menu.

Kariatis Platía Katehäki 12. Pricey, pretentious place serving a sleek blend of Greek and Italian food on a terrace drowned in operatic arias. Also does pizzas.

Karnáyio Platía Katehäki 8, set back from the inner harbour by one of the restored Arsenali ☎28210 53366. Not right on the water, but one of the best harbour restaurants nonetheless with an inviting terrace. Its touristy looks belie very good food, a friendly atmosphere and reasonable prices. House specials include *dhakós*, *loukánika* (country sausage) and *kalamaría* (grilled squid) and there's an extensive wine list.

Khrisostomos Ikárou, by the eastern wall (open Oct–April). Not a very attractive setting, but interesting traditional recipes (using Sfakian meat) served in a thoroughly untouristy environment by the proprietor of the taverna at Mármara beach (p.358), where he's to be found when this place is closed.

Konaki Kondiláki 40. A fine old mansion near the top of Kondiláki, with attractive courtyard tables in summer. A bit of an "international" menu, but on the whole well executed.

Mathios Aktí Enóseos 3, inner harbour. Haniá's oldest fish taverna and another good choice in this area.

Mesostrato Aktí Tombazi on the outer harbour. Good service and well-prepared Greek food in the romantic, roofless remains of an old mansion.

Mihalis Zambelíu 31 ☎28210 58330. Not quite as good as when it first opened, this is nevertheless still a decent bet for dining on the waterfront. Cretan specialities such as *cóchli* (snails) and *hórta* (wild greens) feature on a varied menu and there's a decent wine list.

Nikteridha 5km east of town in the village of Korakiés ☎28210 64215. Head for Akrotíri and, at the top of the hill after the Venizélos tombs, follow the signs to the village. Founded in 1933, this upmarket and stylish taverna serving traditional staples has a delightful garden setting and is especially worthwhile on Mondays and Wednesdays when there's often music and dancing. You'll pass a couple of other (cheaper) places with outdoor grills and views over Haniá – as well as more music and dancing – as you climb up the road out of town.

O Painaleon Venizélou 86. "The Hungry Man" is a simple place in the modern town serving large portions mainly to locals on their lunch breaks. Closed August.

To Pigadi Tou Tourkou ("The Well of the Turk"), Sarpáki 1 ☎28210 54547. Greco-Moroccan restaurant with an interesting menu combining the two cuisines as well as adding a few dishes – such as Tunisian, Egyptian and Lebanese *mezédhes* – from the wider Middle East.

Rudi's Bierhaus Sífaka 24, east of Platía Sindriváni. Haniá's beer shrine: Austrian Rudi Riegler stocks almost a hundred of Europe's finest beers and will explain the story behind each one if you have the time and inclination. He also serves up some very good *mezédhes* to go with them, too. At the time of writing Rudi is negotiating a move into larger premises directly opposite, so if this place is closed check the other side of the street.

Somewhat pricey, but attractive, with a small terrace.

Tamam Zambelíu 49, just before the Renieri Gate ☎28210 96080. Excellent food from an adventurous Greek menu, with plenty of vegetarian options. Unfortunately there are only a few cramped tables outside where you often get jostled by the passing multitude, and it can get hot inside.

Tholos Ay. Dhéka 36. A stone's throw north of the Cathedral, this is yet another recycled Venetian ruin with tables outside in a courtyard. The food is good, too: *moskhári tis yiayiás* (grandma's veal) is a house speciality, and there are lots of seafood options.

Zorba's Aktí Koundouriótou 39. There's little outwardly to distinguish this from the other tourist traps around the outer harbour, but the cooking – especially if you stick to Greek dishes – is honest, as apparently are the claims that Anthony Quinn stayed (and ate) here during the filming of *Zorba the Greek*.

Cafés, bars and snacks

The abundant **cafés** round the harbour tend to serve cocktails and fresh juices at exorbitant prices, though breakfast (especially "English") can be good value. There are more traditional places all around town – by the Cathedral; at the market, where you also find a couple of good *zaharoplastía* (one on Tsoudherón, the other, *Kronos*, on Mousoúron, down the steps from the side entrance of the market); and along Dhaskaloyiánnis, where Platía 1821 is a delightfully tranquil oasis (*Synganaki*, on Dhaskaloyiánnis, is a good traditional bakery serving *tyrópita* and the like, with a cake shop next door). **Fast food** is also increasingly widespread, with numerous *souvláki* places and even a couple of burger joints; Platía 1866 in the new town has a number of outlets, including a branch of *Everest* for good sandwiches. If you want to gather provisions for a **picnic**, head for the market, which offers vast quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as meat and fish, bread, dairy stalls for milk, cheese and yoghurt, and general stores for cooked meats, tins and other provisions. There are minimarkets scattered through the old town, including a couple of expensive ones on Hálidhon, or a handful of larger **supermarkets** not far away: Inka on Platía 1866 has most things, but the largest is Champion at the top of Pireós, just west of the Schiavo Bastion.

L'Antigiano Platía Mitropóleos (cathedral square), cnr Isodhíon. Authentic Italian ice cream.

Aroma Aktí Tombázi 4, next to the Mosque of the Janissaries. Pleasant café with a great harbour view to savour over lazy breakfasts or late drinks.

To Avgo Tou Kokora ("The Rooster's Egg"), corner of Ay. Dhéka and Sarpáki near the Cathedral. Pleasant modern bar with a good line in pancakes, salads and snacks.

Cosy Roof Garden Platía Mitropóleos. Pleasant roof-terrace bar overlooking the square for breakfast or cocktails and late drinks.

Fortetza Sea wall, near the lighthouse. Strange hybrid restaurant/café on the far side of the harbour near the lighthouse. A free ferry shuttle takes people across the inner harbour – a good gimmick, saving you a lengthy walk. Wonderful place to have an aperitif at sunset, but most popular late at night; there are queues for the boat at midnight.

To Haniotiko Platía 1821. Great little *kafenío* on this quiet square. Among their *mezédhes* choices *kalitsoúnia hórta* (vegetable pie) and *ktapódi krasáto* (octopus in wine) are tasty. The bar also has a long *lyra* and *rembétika* tradition and stages live performances during the winter months.

Iordanis Bougatsa Kidhonías 96, opposite the bus station. This place serves little except the traditional creamy *bougátsa*, a sugar-coated cheese pie to eat in or take away. Another branch is at Apokorónou 24, between the market and the tourist office.

Kentrikon Episkopí Dorothéou, cnr Betólo behind the Cathedral. Relaxed café with tables outside on the pedestrianized street.

Meltemi Angélou 6. Slow, relaxed place for breakfast with harbour view and easy chairs; later on, locals (and especially expats) sit whiling the day away or playing *távli*.

Mitropolitikon Platía Mitropóleos. Pleasant setting with tables out on the square in front of the Cathedral. Serves good juices.

Muses Platía Sindriváni at the bottom of Kaneváro. Long-established favourite in a prime position for people-watching. Open 24 hours for drinks, breakfast and light meals.

Porta di Porto Zambelíu, corner of Platía Sindriváni. Despite a name change still the most popular *souvláki* and fast-food place in the old town.

Synagogi Between Kondiláki and Skúfon. Taking its name from the restored old Jewish synagogue next door, this is a peaceful café by day and later a pleasant drinks bar with good music. It occupies a Venetian mansion bombed in World War II.

Time Out Platía 1866. Fast-food Cretan style, serving everything from *yíros pítta* to lamb stews, to sandwiches and spaghetti, 24 hours a day.

Zaharoplastio 13 Platía 1866. Excellent breakfast café in the real heart of town, with an outdoor terrace to watch the action.

Nightlife and entertainment

Haniá's **nightlife** is frenetic throughout the summer, and if you want to dance until dawn there are plenty of possibilities. The local crowd tend to cruise the **bars** along Aktí Míaouli and the eastern part of the old town in the Koum Kápi quarter, before heading out around midnight to the large **discos** and **clubs** along the coast to the west; there are regular late-night police road-blocks checking for drunken drivers here. The big out-of-town clubs include *Privilege*, between Plataniás and Geráni, *Utopia* in Plataniás, *Mambo* on the Káto Stalós waterfront, and *Destyle* in Ayía Marína. If that's too much of a long haul, there are plenty of places in town to work up a sweat. The bars around the harbour are plenty lively, though the clientele tends to be tourists and – especially when a ship is in – servicemen from the NATO bases. Aktí Míaouli, whose waterfront terrace bars are packed with young locals throughout the summer, may be less frenetic.

A few places offer more traditional entertainment, including **dancing**. *Café Kriti*, at Kalergón 22 on the corner with Andróyeo, is an old-fashioned *kafenío* where there's Greek music and dancing virtually every night. It's also worth checking for events at the open-air auditorium in the Public Gardens and for performances in restaurants outside the city, which are the ones locals go to. The hoardings in front of the market usually have details of these, together with programme information for the couple of **open-air cinemas** that show English-language films with subtitles (rather than dubbed versions): the Kipos in the Public Gardens, and the Attikon on Elefthériou Venizélou out towards Akrotíri, about 1km east of the centre. The latter has a great atmosphere, but be sure to sit near a speaker since they reduce the sound level as the evening progresses so as not to offend the neighbours.

The main annual **festival** in Haniá is the commemoration of the Battle of Crete around May 20 (when accommodation is also at a premium), with folklore and other events mostly in the Public Gardens. Also celebrated is June 24, the feast of Áyios Ioánnis (St John). Check with the tourist office for details of these and other celebrations in the nearby villages.

Late bars, clubs and discos

Anadromi Aktí Míaouli at the eastern end. Glitzy café with expansive summer terrace, huge screens (showing pop DVDs or big-match Greek football) and cool sounds. Typical of the nightlife places in this zone, and in winter the action moves into the double-storey building behind. Open from breakfast until the wee hours. The nearby *Hellenikon* is similar.

Ta Duo Lux Sarpidóna 8. One of a number of terrace style bars lining this street with a varied range of music and an upstairs tea bar.

El Mondo Kondiláki. A survivor from the days when this street was very rowdy, and a place that is still popular with military types in from the bases.

Fagotto Angélou 16. Very pleasant laid-back jazz bar, often with live performers in high season.

Four Seasons Inner harbour. Recently refurbished music bar by the port police, where the town's youth gather to size each other up.

To Mikro Kafenío Aktí Míaouli 6. Another Koum Kápi favourite with the nighttime movers and shakers, where the music is soft and the cocktails are potent – sipped on a sea-front terrace for seeing and being seen.

To Monastíri tou Károlos H Daliáni 22. "Károlos's monastery" is the art and performance centre of internationally acclaimed artist Károlos Cambelopoulos whose art works – including bronzes of María Callas and Kazantzákis – decorate the building. Sited in the elegantly restored sixteenth-century monastery of Santa María de la Misericordia, the centre's patio theatre (with bar) showcases music groups from Crete, Greece and the Balkans (April–Sept Thurs–Sat 10pm; €6). The centre also mounts art shows and is open throughout the day with a small café.

Pallas Aktí Tombázi 15, slightly north of the Mosque of the Janissaries. Inviting roof-garden bar on the harbours offering music and cocktails. Fine views over both harbours.

Point Platía Sindriváni above *Muses* café. Another upper-floor bar overlooking the harbour; laid-back in the early evening and gets louder as the night progresses.

Listings

Airlines Olympic, Tzanakáki 88 Mon–Fri 9am–4pm (ⓣ28210 57701–3, ⓦwww.olympicairlines.com) . Aegean, Venizélou 12 (ⓣ28210 51100, ⓦwww.aegeanair.com). For airport information call ⓣ28210 63264.

Banks National Bank of Greece (two ATMs), opposite the market; more banks and ATMs are around the top of Hálidhon.

Bike and car rental For bikes, Summertime, Dhaskaloyiánnis 7, (ⓣ28210 45797, ⓦwww.strentals.gr). For cars, Tellus Rent a Car, Hálidhon 108 (ⓣ28210 91500) or Kiriakis Travel, Yiánnari 78 (ⓣ28210 27700). *Rough Guide* readers get 25 percent off from El Greco Cars at the *El Greco* hotel (ⓣ28210 60883, ⓦwww.elgreco.gr). Avis, Tzanakáki 58 (ⓣ28210 50510); Hertz, Venizélou 12 (ⓣ28210 40366).

Boat trips A number of boats make daily trips from Haniá, to the islands of Áyii Theódori and Lazaretta, for swimming and *kri-kri* (ibex) spotting. The *Evagelos* glass-bottomed boat makes this trip three times daily, with an all-day alternative on Saturdays to the Rodhópou peninsula (for information call ⓣ6945874283); the *MS Irini* (ⓣ28210 52001) is a more traditional vessel. The local nautical club on Aktí Kanári has a sailing school (ⓣ28210 96078, ⓦwww.nox.gr), or contact E. Barbopoulos at Tsoudherón 1 (ⓣ28210 22244).

Diving Blue Adventures Diving, Archoleon 11 (ⓣ28210 40608, ⓦwww.blueadventuresdiving.gr), is a PADI-certificated operation. Beginners courses start at €75 for a one-day taster with two dives.

Ferry tickets The ANEK Line office is on Venizélou, right opposite the market (ⓣ28210 27500, ⓦwww.anek.gr); Blue Star is at Platía 1866 14, under the *Hotel Arkadi* (ⓣ28210 75444, ⓦwww.bluestarferries.gr).

Hospital For an ambulance, dial ⓣ166. The city's hospital is in the village of Mourniés, 1.5km south of the centre (ⓣ28210 22000). Private clinics include Therapeutiko Kentro, N. Fokás 2 (ⓣ28210 56326); Medical Centre of Crete, Hatzidhákis 5 (ⓣ28210 59034); and Medical Centre, Markou Botsári 76 (ⓣ28210 96800).

Internet *Triple W*, Odhós Baladhinou; *Vranas*, Ayíon Dhéka beneath *Vranas Studios* (see p.305; minimum 1hr, though credit given); *Café Notos*, under the *Hotel Notos*; and *Cosmos*, Platía Sindriváni.

Laundry Speedy Laundry (ⓣ28210 88411; 9am–9pm), junction of Koronéou and Korkidi, will collect and deliver your load if you call; Afrodite, Ayíon Dhéka 22 (daily 8.30am–8.30pm) and Fidias, Sarpáki 6; Mon–Sat 9am–9pm). All do service washes for around €7.50.

Left luggage The bus station has a left-luggage office open 6am–8.30pm; €1–2 per item per day depending on size.

Mountain climbing and walking The local EOS mountaineering club, at Tzanakáki 90 (ⓣ28210 44647, ⓦwww.eoshanion.gr), provides information about climbing in the Lefká Óri and takes reservations for the mountain refuge at Kallergi, near the Samariá Gorge (see p.346). Karistianis, Skalídhí 9, near Hálidhon sells hiking boots and a wide range of mountain gear and clothing.

Pharmacies Several on Yiánnari between the market and Platía 1866; more up Tzanakáki.

Post office The main post office is on Odhós Plastira just around the corner from the *Dhimarhío* and tourist office (Mon–Fri 7.30am–8pm, Sat 9am–1pm).

Taxis The main taxi ranks are in Platía 1866 and at the bottom of Karaiskáki, just of Yiánnari. For radio taxis try ⓣ18300, 28210 94300 or ⓣ28210 98700.

Telephones Cardphones are all over town; buy cards from any street *períptero* kiosk.

Tourist police Irakliou 23 (ⓣ28210 25931 or 28210 28708), some way south of the centre in the new town.

Tours Any travel agent (see below) can sell you a day-trip to the Samariá Gorge, or Knossós, or dozens of others. A "Little Train" tour of the new town sets off regularly from the waterfront car park by the Fírkas. Other activities include horseriding in the country to the west (ⓣ28240 31339).

Travel agencies El Greco Travel, Kidhonías 76 (ⓣ28210 86015), Tellus Travel, Hálidhon 108 (ⓣ28210 91500) and Elyros Travel, on Platía 1866 (ⓣ28210 74191) offer inexpensive bus tickets, flights and standard excursions. For cheap tickets home try Bassias Travel, Hálidhon 69 (ⓣ28210 44295), which also deals in standard excursions.

Waterpark Limnoupolis, a big park with some spectacular slides, play areas and several pools, as well as a number of fast-food outlets, is located close to the village of Varipetro, 6km southwest of the city (€16 for adults, €11 for kids aged 6–12). Buses leave (six daily) from the bus station.

Akrotíri and the Bay of Soúdha

The hilly peninsula of **Akrotíri** loops round to the east of Haniá, protecting the magnificent anchorages of the Bay of Soúdha. It's a somewhat strange amalgam, with a couple of developing **resorts** along with burgeoning suburbs on the north coast, several ancient **monasteries** in the northeast, and military installations and the airport dominating the centre and south. The resorts that maps show on the peninsula's southeastern flank are not worth the petrol getting there: one, Pervolítsa, is next to the city of Haniá's main rubbish dump while the other, Maráthi, is a fairly scruffy little place attracting more cars and bathers than its small beach is able to accommodate. One thing worth bearing in mind is the shortage of hotel or pension accommodation; this is very much apartment and villa country geared to families staying at least a week at a time. Outside August you should be able to find something on spec, but even then you'd be well advised to try phoning ahead, as few of the places have regular reception hours. You'll need your own transport to explore much here; there are buses to Stavrós, and occasional tours to the monasteries, but little else.

The Venizélos Graves

Following the Akrotíri signs east out of Haniá you embark on a long climb as you leave the city. At the top there's a sign to the **Venizélos Graves**, the simple stone-slab tombs of Eleftheríos Venizélos, Crete's most famous statesman, and his son Sophocles. The immaculately tended garden setting, looking back over Haniá and the coast for miles beyond, is magnificent and also historic – the scene in 1897 of an illegal raising of the Greek flag in defiance of the Turks and the European powers. The flagpole was smashed by a salvo from the European fleet, but the Cretans raised their standard by hand, keeping it flying even under fire. Two stories attach to this: one that the sailors were so impressed that they all stopped firing to applaud; the second that a shell fired from a Russian ship hit the little church of Profítis Elías, which still stands, and that divine revenge caused the offending ship itself to explode the very next day. There are several excellent **cafés** and snack places here, including *Nymphes*, *Ostria* and *KouKou Vayia*, all packed with locals at weekends, when they come to pay their respects, admire the view, and gorge on cakes and ice cream. During the week it's delightfully quiet.

Stavrós and the Akrotíri beaches

The road divides by the graves: straight ahead takes you east across the peninsula towards the **airport**. The left fork heads north to Horafákia and the beaches culminating at Stavrós, Akrotíri's most popular resort. This is pleasant country to drive around, gently rolling and dotted with villages that are clearly quite wealthy – many city workers live out here or build themselves country villas. About 5km north of the graves, past the village of **Kounoupidhianá**, the road suddenly plunges down and emerges by the **beach** at **Kalathás**, two little patches of sand divided by a rocky promontory, with a bar and taverna, the *Estiatorio Kalathas*, right on the sand. This makes a fine place to spend a lazy day, marred only slightly by the proximity of the road: there's an offshore island to which you can swim, and good snorkelling. There are also a couple of attractive places to stay here, though both are often occupied by officers from the NATO base: *Lena Beach* (☎28210 64750, ⓦwww.lenabeach.com; ⑥), the big hotel you see immediately above the beach, with attractive balcony rooms, and *Giorgi's Blue Apartments* (☎28210 64080, ⓦwww.blueapts.gr; ⑦), signed from the road, with very comfortable apartments, and a pool and bar beautifully situated above a rocky coastline.

Horafákia, inland a little further on, has the bulk of the local facilities including shops and a travel agent/car hire place. From here a road leads down to the coast at **Tersanas** where there's a tiny cove beach, shallow and safe for small children, as well as a couple of tavernas: *Sunset*, near the top of the road down here, has views over the coast and a children's playground as well as decent food. Three kilometres beyond Horafákia, you finally reach **Stavrós** and its near-perfect **beach**, an almost completely enclosed circular bay. The sea is dead calm with gently shelving sand underfoot, making it ideal for kids. It's an extraordinary-looking place, too, with a sheer, bare mountainside rising just 100m away from you on the far side of the bay. This is where the cataclysmic climax of *Zorba the Greek* was filmed (the hill is known locally as Zorba's Mountain) and is also the site of a **cave**, whose entrance can just about be seen from the beach, in which there was an ancient sanctuary.

Stavrós beach is often crowded – sometimes unpleasantly so as it doesn't take many people to fill it up – but even so it's a great place to bask for a few hours, and is the one place near Haniá that's easily accessible by bus (six daily). There's a far less visited patch of sand facing directly out to sea if you do find it oppressive. Stavrós has relatively few facilities beyond a couple of minimarkets and snack bars, while the apartments and rooms places are mostly pre-booked. There are a couple of **tavernas**, though – *Christina* behind the beach and old favourite *Zorba's* set back a little.

Practicalities

If you have your own transport, you can drive around the surrounding countryside, checking out the numerous apartment complexes; without it, you'll find it much harder to find **accommodation** in this region, though the first few of the options below are in easy walking distance of Stavrós. If you're coming from Haniá, it's worth checking at travel agents there, many of whom represent one or more of the local apartment-owners. At Stavrós, *Blue Beach Apartments* (☎28210

39404, ⓦwww.bluebeach-villas.com; ④–⑥) has much the best position, on the sea front at the western end of the sea beach (to get to it by road, you have to drive some way round inland), with its own tiny sand beach, small pool and a seaside terrace where meals are served. Accommodation runs from two-person studios up to three-room apartments. Immediately inland, *Zorba's Apartments* (ⓣ28210 39010, ⓦwww.hotel-zorbas.gr; ④) are less attractive, though they also have a pool and tennis court. On the sea front next to *Blue Beach*, *Thanassis* taverna has a lovely terrace above the water, and a tiny strip of sand with free loungers for clients. In Stavrós village you could try *Sweet Dreams* rooms (ⓣ28210 39645, ⓦwww.roomstorent.info; ③), with tidy air-conditioned studios arranged around a pool.

Apart from these, accommodation is widely scattered in the flat plains lining the coast between Stavrós and Tersanas. Among the places to which you'll see signs as you drive around – all with pools – are *Villa Eleana* (ⓣ28210 39480; ③–④), an apartment/studio hotel with two wheelchair-accessible studios; the simpler *Apartments Rosa* (ⓣ28210 55970; ②); and *Georgia-Vicky Apartments* (ⓣ28210 39439, ⓔgselimas@otenet.gr; ③–④), an attractive complex above a rocky shore. Here also is the pleasant *Kavos Beach Studios* (ⓣ28210 39155, ⓔkavos@otenet.gr; ④), a complex without a beach, but with poolside bar and taverna; they offer scuba diving and jet-ski activities and tend to cut prices when trade is slack. Very near *Villa Eleana*, there's also the extraordinary *Perle Roi Spa Hotel* (ⓣ28210 39400, ⓦwww.perle-spa.com; ⑧), a huge complex and thalassotherapy centre with no fewer than five indoor and outdoor pools, plus gym, numerous bars and restaurants, kids' club, and almost every other facility you could think of.

The monasteries

There are a number of approaches to the **monasteries** at the northern end of the Akrotíri peninsula, many of which will leave you going round in circles when the signs run out. The most straightforward are to follow the coast road as above and then turn right either in Kounoupidhianá or Horafákia, or to follow the road to the airport, just before which you'll see a sign to Ayía Triádha. On this latter route you'll see evidence of some of the other churches and monasteries that once thrived here, most notably Áyios Ioánnis, a fortress-like structure that is being restored alongside the airport road, just down from its junction with the main road. It's worth noting the **opening hours** of the monasteries if you are planning to visit both in a single trip as the most northerly, Gouvernétou, has recently reduced its opening hours. Check with the Haniá tourist office (p.303) for the latest information.

Ayía Triádha

Ayía Triádha (daily 9am–7.30pm; €2), sometimes known as Moní Zangarólo after its founder, was established in the seventeenth century and built in Venetian style. Today, while not exactly thriving (it has only five monks), it is one of the few Cretan monasteries to preserve real monastic life to any degree. Its imposing ochre frontage is approached through carefully tended fields of vines and olive groves – all the property of the monastery which now bottles and markets its own oil and wine. Close up, though, some of the buildings are distinctly dilapidated and, despite an ongoing programme of renovation (one building to the west has now become the olive-oil factory), much of the premises lie redundant and empty. Some of the halls at the back of the monastery have been given over to the stabling of the monks' goats, and skinny cats wander seemingly at will.

You can walk right through the complex, though the monastic cells are locked, and sit on benches shaded by orange trees in the patio. The **church**, which appears strangely foreshortened, contains a beautiful old gilded altarpiece and, around the walls, ancient wooden stalls; like most of the monastery it is built from stone that glows orange in the afternoon sun. By the entrance is a small **museum** with silver chalices, vestments, relics and manuscripts, mostly dating from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and a few icons that are considerably older. In the courtyard there's a water cooler, and, if you're lucky in quieter times, the traditional hospitality will extend further, to a glass of *raki* and a piece of *loukoúm* in the hall where you sign the visitors' book. There's a small shop, too, selling postcards as well as the monks' olive oil and wine, intended to raise funds for the restoration programme.

Gouvernétou and Katholikó

Outside Ayía Triádha a sign directs you north towards **Gouvernétou** (Mon, Tues & Fri 9am–12noon & 5–7pm; Sat & Sun 5–11am & 5–8pm; closed Wed & Fri; free) – about 4km away, on a road ascending through a biblical landscape of rocks and wild olives, the final section paved but horribly rutted as it twists through a steep rocky gully. The monastery itself is a simple square block of a building, older than Ayía Triádha, with the usual refreshingly shaded patio and ancient frescoes in the church; there's a tiny museum, too. Despite its more remote location, Gouvernétou, beautifully renovated and with carefully tended flowerbeds and chapel, feels like a thriving community. Nevertheless, the stark surroundings help to give a real sense of the isolation that the remaining three monks must face for most of the year.

Immediately above Gouvernétou is a simple marble war memorial and, beyond, you can follow (on foot) a paved path which leads down towards the sea. After about ten minutes you reach a **cave** in which St John the Hermit is said to have lived and died – a large, low cavern, stark, dank and dripping, with hefty stalactites and stalagmites and a substantial bathing tank in the centre, probably for baptisms. Excavations revealed that this had been an important Minoan shrine, and in the Greek period it became a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Small outbuildings surround the entrance.

Thus far the walk has been easy, along an obvious path, but as you continue to descend the going gets steeper, rockier and sharper. In a further fifteen minutes you reach the amazing **ruins** of the **Monastery of Katholikó**, built into the side of, and partly carved from, a craggy ravine of spectacular desolation. This is older than its neighbours: it was abandoned over three hundred years ago when the monks, driven by repeated pirate raids, moved up to the comparative safety of Gouvernétou. The valley sides are dotted with caves, which formed a centre of still-earlier Christian worship, at least one of which (just before the buildings) you can explore if you have a torch.

Spanning the ravine by the ruins is a vast **bridge** leading nowhere. Cross it and you can scramble down to the bottom of the ravine and follow the stream bed for about another fifteen minutes all the way to the sea. There's a tiny natural **harbour**, a fjord-like finger of water pushing up between the rocks, where remains of a port can still be made out. Hewn from the rock, and with part of its roof intact, is what appears to be an ancient boathouse or slipway. There's no beach, but it's easy enough, and delightfully welcome, to lower yourself from the rocks straight into the astonishingly clear green water. The walk back up takes perhaps an hour in all – and is much more strenuous than it might have seemed on the way down.

Soúdha Bay

On the **south side** of the Akrotíri peninsula there are beaches near Stérnes, pretty isolated from a visitor's point of view, but not as deserted as you might hope.

Almost all of this region is a **military zone**, and the beaches are popular with the NATO personnel based here. There's an R&R base and officers' club at **Maráthi**, for example, which has sheltered, if not particularly pleasant sandy beaches with views across the mouth of the bay. This has grown into a resort of sorts which has attracted rooms places and tavernas, the latter often overloaded in high summer, but it has few charms. Boat trips from Haniá or the resorts across the bay occasionally run to the little harbour here only adding to the crush for space on the beach. The views of the bay are best on the descent towards Maráthi (watch out for unmarked junctions on this road) – above all, of a little **island** (Néa Soúdha), bristling with Venetian and Turkish fortifications which, from a distance at least, appear miraculously well-preserved. It proved as impressive a defence as it looks, holding out as a Venetian stronghold for over thirty years after the rest of Crete had fallen, before eventually being voluntarily abandoned.

For an alternative route back, you can turn left off the main road to curve around the head of the bay, on the road to Soúdha town. This again affords spectacular views of the bay (though there are signs prohibiting photography of the military secrets therein), down over the villas built into the hillside. This route is also the shortest way from Akrotíri to the E75 highway, bypassing Haniá.

The Allied war cemetery

Just before Soúdha, at the water's edge, you pass the beautifully sited **Allied war cemetery**, a melancholy and moving spot. Surrounded by eucalyptus trees, it lies 1km before the town, down a lane signed "Soúdha cemetery". With its row upon row of immaculately tended headstones, many of them to unknown soldiers and very young men, the serene and dignified cemetery brings home with some force the scale of the calamity of the Battle of Crete in which most of them perished. Grave 10E on the cemetery's northern side is that of the distinguished archeologist John Pendlebury (see p.438), who took over at Knossós after Evans retired; he died fighting alongside Cretans during the German assault on Iráklion in 1941.

East to Yeoryioúpolis

Heading east out of Haniá you can either head south through the new town to pick up the main E75 road on the south side of town, or follow the buses and most of the other traffic to Soúdha and join it there. As the E75 climbs above the edge of the **Bay of Soúdha**, it follows the track of the old road; at the point of the bay stands an old fortress, originally the Turkish bastion of **Izzedin**, now pressed into service as a prison.

The new road is fast, but you'll see little through the screen of trees and flowering shrubs until you emerge on the coast just past **Yeoryioúpolis**. Once you set off down the hill past Izzedin there are a couple of turn-offs to villages but just one junction of any size, between Vrísses and Yeoryioúpolis, signed to both of them. If you're in no hurry, or you simply want an attractive circular drive, then the minor roads that head inland or out onto the Dhrápano peninsula have much more to offer.

Áptera and around

Shortly before the prison there's a junction: turn off here and you can head left to Kalámi (just a few hundred metres away, immediately below the prison) and Kalíves (which you can see on the coast way below). To the right the road climbs to **Megála Horáfia** and, turning off again, ancient **Áptera** (Tues–Sun 8am–3pm;

free). Áptera occupies the table top of this mesa-like mountain, about 3km from – and a good climb above – the highway. You can leave your vehicle in Megála Horáfia and walk to the main part of the site, on the path described below, in about fifteen minutes; alternatively the road carries on to the hilltop, one fork heading for the fortress, the other for a parking area by the main site. The hilltop has little shade, and can be very hot.

This location appears in Linear B inscriptions, and therefore seems to have been **continuously occupied** from as early as the fourteenth century BC right up to 1964, when the monastery here was finally abandoned. Áptera's peak came from the fifth century BC into early Christian times, when it was one of the island's most important cities. Work on the very extensive remains is continuing, so new areas may be opened up, or others fenced off for excavation. The main entrance is by the **Monastery** of Áyios Ioánnis Theólogos – the most obvious building at the site. Here the biggest of the fenced areas includes the monastery, the cisterns, a bath complex and, right by the entrance, a fifth-century BC Classical Greek **temple** marked by huge stone slabs. The amazing Roman **cisterns**, brick-lined and mainly underground, must be among the largest surviving. A real highlight, they are an awesome, cavernous testament to Roman engineering genius. Below spreads a very extensive **Roman bath** complex, all of which inevitably raises the question of just how enough water to fill the vast cisterns and feed the baths was collected on what is now a barren hilltop, although it could be that long gone aqueducts were the source.

Scattered around the immediate area are numerous other remains, mostly signed but not all accessible. Check the map at the site entrance (if you're lucky, there may be a leaflet) to find them. Many are reached by a well-signed path on the opposite side of the car park from the monastery (and outside the fenced site). There are remains of a small **theatre** here, and of a **Roman villa** full of collapsed pillars. To reach the latter head along a path through the olives for 150m in a roughly southwest direction. When you reach them, the remains of the first or second-century peristyle villa are impressive and the size of the collapsed stone columns are evidence of how grand it must once have been. You also pass a World War II machine-gun post, which, if it weren't signed, could easily be mistaken for another restored Roman ruin. The path continues down towards Megála Horáfia and ends, right on the edge of the village, by a substantial section of the ancient city **wall**, complete with defensive tower and gate.

Another attraction of the site is a crumbling Turkish **fort** – substantially shored up with reinforced concrete – on the lip of the hilltop. There's no access to the interior, but you can still enjoy the best of all the **views** across Soúdha to the Akrotíri peninsula. Immediately below is the Izzedin fortress, and below that the three small islands, including heavily fortified Néa Soúdha, which protect the narrow entrance to the bay. From here the islet's superb strategic qualities are plain, with the deep-water anchorages accessible only by running the gauntlet of these forts and fortified islands. According to legend the islands were formed after a musical contest between the Muses and the Sirens on the height near the ancient city: defeated, the Sirens plucked off their wings, flung themselves into the bay, and were transformed into the islands. Áptera, literally translated, can mean "featherless" or "wingless" – one derivation of the city's name.

If you're looking for **food** before or after visiting the ruins, Megála Horáfia offers a number of possibilities. The Anglo-Greek 🏃 *Taverna Aptera*, right on the road, is recommended: they may also be able to steer you in the direction of one of the particularly good **villas** (some with pool) that dot this area. Most are pre-booked, of course, but if there are vacancies they can often be taken for the odd day or two.

Stílos and Samonás

From Áptera you can retrace your steps back to the main road, or continue inland to circle round via the Dhrápano peninsula, a very attractive drive. Heading south, the first place of any size is **Stílos**, which is where the Australian and New Zealand rearguard made their final stand during the Battle of Crete (this was then the main road south), enabling the majority of Allied troops to be evacuated while they themselves were mostly stranded on the island. Many found refuge in the villages in the foothills around here and were later smuggled off the island – some of these villages were destroyed in retribution. Today Stílos is an unremarkable agricultural centre, but there are a couple of *kafenía* with shady tables beside the road where you can pull over for a drink.

Not far beyond comes the turning to **Samonás**, a narrow road winding steeply up through 180-degree hairpins, with better views at every turn. The reason to take this detour is to visit the isolated Byzantine church of **Áyios Nikólaos** at Kiriakosélia, signed beyond Samonás, which, for location and artworks, is one of the most beautiful on the island. The church, nestling in a valley, has recently been restored and contains fantastic **medieval frescoes**, as good as any on Crete. Painted in the thirteenth century, these have not been touched by the restorers – at least not recently – and are patchy and faded against their deep-blue background, but parts still seem as vivid as the day they were created. A Madonna and Child, at eye level on the left-hand side, and a dramatic Christ *Pantokrátor* in the drum dome stand out. You really need a car to see them, because the keyholders (Kostas or Roussa) live in Samonás – you pick them up there and drive on to the church, a couple of hilly kilometres further. To fix up a visit head for the *kafenío* in Samonás – preferably in the afternoon – and they'll phone for someone to take you, and cheerily overcharge for a drink while you wait. By contrast Kostas or Roussa (or one of their family) always seem to refuse money for their time.

If you've got time to spare on the return leg, from the junction at Stilós there's a scenic ten-kilometre drive north and then west to the pretty hill village of **Maláxa**, where a good taverna, *Panorama* (evenings only) has a terrace with stunning **views** over the Bay of Soúdha.

The Dhrápano peninsula and Vrísses

A multitude of roads crisscrosses the **Dhrápano peninsula** east of Haniá, almost all of them scenic and well-surfaced. Known as the **Apókoronas** region, this is rich agricultural land, a countryside of rolling green, wooded hills interrupted by immaculately whitewashed, and obviously wealthy, villages. Part of this wealth is fuelled by a real-estate boom in which foreigners and the wealthy from Haniá are buying up village houses to convert into weekend and holiday retreats as well as retirement homes. There's an enormous amount of new villa construction too, as seemingly every landowner with a plot to sell attempts to cash in. A score of development companies (many from Britain whose signs clutter the roadside and several villages) are only too willing to assist them and the implications for this particularly scenic region are worrying. Meanwhile, nowhere are there individual attractions to detain you long, and all these settlements have *kafenía* where you can sit awhile and wonder at the rural tranquility away from the main-road traffic. Coming from Stílos you can either head through Néo Horío to Kalíves on the coast, or turn off later for Vámos at the centre of the peninsula. The direct approach, however, is from the E75 highway below Áptera.

Kalíves

From Kalámi, the old road drops rapidly down to the coast at **Kalíves**, an agricultural market centre of some size. As you approach, you pass a long sandy beach in the lee of Áptera's castle-topped bluff, which looks attractive but is hard to reach. The main **beach** stretches in both directions from the centre of the village, best at the eastern end where it curves round to a small harbour in the lee of a headland. The village itself is not particularly attractive at first sight, a rather straggly development lining the main road for over 2km. It's very much a package resort these days too, although the mainly low-rise apartments and studios keep it low-key. Along with Almirídha (see below) Kalíves has become a focus for the mainly British villa-owning community in the surrounding hills and the number of businesses and bars with English names has mushroomed over recent years, somewhat denting the resort's appeal. The centre of town is marked by a small square with a church, and the most attractive parts are round here, especially if you cut through to the sea front just one block away. Most facilities are just here, including a **bank** with ATM and a couple of **travel agencies** that can arrange local accommodation, as well as car hire, money exchange and excursions: Kalives Travel (ⓣ28250 31473), Flisvos Travel (ⓣ28250 31337; good for car hire) and Valeria Travel (ⓣ28250 32392; with a good choice of apartments). **Internet** access is available at *Digiland* (daily 9am–2am) near Kalives Travel.

If you want somewhere **to stay**, the travel agencies listed above make a good starting point, as they tend to represent apartments slightly further out which can be very good value. There's a fair amount of choice in town too, most obviously the rather incongruous *Kalives Beach Hotel* (ⓣ28250 31285, ⓦwww.kalyvesbeach.com; ⑧), right in the centre of the sea front, whose facilities include indoor and outdoor pools plus a tiny gym and beach bar. Simpler rooms places include *Asteria* (ⓣ28250 31330; ④), for a/c studios with kitchenette right in the centre; *Akti Galini* (ⓣ28250 32066, ⓦwww.aktigalinis.com; ③), in a quieter spot just off the main road towards the beach; or *Blue Sea* (ⓣ28250 32159; ③), looking out over the eastern end of the beach. Places **to eat** are plentiful. On the sea front at the eastern end of the beach *Taverna Elena* is good, but the best sea-front food (especially fish) is served at ★ *Provlíta* (ⓣ28250 31835) at the opposite – western – end of the sea front with directions signed repeatedly along the main street. Inland, *Zorba's*, with a large terrace at the back of the main square, opposite the church, is also good for taverna staples, or for snacks and drinks try the nearby *Kafenio Potamos*, with tables overlooking the river that runs through the middle of town. Another bunch of good possibilities is at the eastern end of town, including *Il Fourno*, for pizza from a wood-fired oven, and *Medusa*.

Almirídha

Almirídha, the next village along the coast, is smaller, marginally more of a resort, and considerably more attractive. A row of tavernas behind a couple of small patches of sand in a sheltered bay marks the centre. The lovely beach is a popular spot for **windsurfing**, with a fairly reliable breeze once you're slightly offshore. When the breeze blows inland, seafront dining becomes a somewhat risky experience – though on a hot day it's always a welcome refresher. Like Kalíves, Almirídha is popular with local families who drive down to swim and enjoy a leisurely lunch.

If you want to **stay**, you'll again find that accommodation is mostly in the form of widely scattered apartment blocks, and the best thing to do is to ask around in the tavernas, each of which advertises places to rent. Rooms in the centre are few and often full, but you could try *Marilena's Pension* (ⓣ28250 32202; ②) at the east end of the seafront for balcony en-suite rooms with kitchenette. Near the *Thalami* taverna, *Kelaidi Apartments* (ⓣ28520 32580; ④) has pleasant studios with sea view, and George & Lilian's jewellery shop next door operates *Villa Armonia* (ⓣ28520 31081 ⓔnikolgg@otenet.gr; ④) offering spacious air-conditioned apartments with sea view slightly inland; some larger apartments (⑥) sleep up to four. The best of the upmarket options is the *Dimitra Hotel*, 150m inland from the sea front with pool (Ⓣ28250 31956, Ⓦwww.dimitra-hotel.com; ⑦), where half board (breakfast and dinner) is compulsory but rates are little different from similar places nearby, and outside August prices drop by 25 percent.

For **eating**, the fish tavernas are worth a try, particularly *Dimitri's*, as well as *Thalami*, which also offers standard Greek dishes. Also recommended is the attractive *Lagos* taverna, on the road at the very western edge of the village. The British presence (see Kalíves, opposite) is evident in the names of many of the newer bars and cocktail places along the sea front, quite a few with giant screens that draw in expats at weekends for English Premier League football games; some of these also have **Internet** connections.

Should you want to take advantage of the breezes with a spot of **windsurfing**, French-run UCPA (Ⓣ28250 31443, Ⓦwww.ucpa.com/windsurf; 10am–6pm daily) on the sea front rents out boards for €8 an hour, as well as kayaks and catamarans. To **rent a car** or bike try Flisvos (Ⓣ28250 31100), with an office just behind the sea front. One sight definitely worth a look while you're here is the remains of an **early Christian basilica** dating from the fifth century, with a wonderful mosaic floor. It lies at the west end of the village, close to the *Lagos* taverna, the latter shaded by a great plane tree.

Pláka and around the coast

Beyond Almirídha the coast becomes increasingly rocky, with cliffs almost all the way round to Yeoryioúpolis denying access to the sea. The roads and the signage also deteriorate if you go this way, but as you climb the views become increasingly worthwhile. The first place you reach is **Pláka**, a beautiful hamlet little over a kilometre to the east, with a couple of tavernas and a tempting cake shop sited on a sleepy central *platía*. Here and all around there's an extraordinary amount of villa construction, but most of it is at least reasonably sympathetic to the local environment. There are also a couple of particularly good places to **stay**: attractive air-conditioned balcony rooms with fridge at *Studios Koukouros* (Ⓣ28250 31145, Ⓦwww.studioskoukouros.gr; ②), which has the bonus of a stunning garden filled with palms, cacti and bougainvillea; or the wonderfully friendly 🏃 *Bicorna Family Hotel* (Ⓣ28250 32073, Ⓦwww.bicorna.gr; ④), with another lush garden, small pool and comfy rooms.

Continuing around the coast, **Kókkino Horió,** on the steep height above Pláka, is if anything even more picturesque – both villages were used as backdrops for the film of *Zorba the Greek*. However, developers are hard at work here too, and large tracts of the hillside overlooking Soúdha Bay are being built up at an alarming pace. At the edge of **Palelóni**, 4km south, a narrow road drops steeply to the coast, where sits a little naval base and a rocky cove with the idyllically situated *Taverna-Café Obrogialos* – a great spot for lunch. **Kefalás**, 2km further along a road above the sea with spectacular views towards Réthimnon, is again absurdly pretty. From here you can head inland towards Vámos, or continue, a little further from the coast, in the direction of Yeoryioúpolis.

Inland to Gavalohóri and Vámos

Good roads head inland from both Kalíves and Almirídha towards the main agricultural centre of the peninsula, and the capital of the Apokóronas district, Vámos. Again, it's interesting driving, with numerous villages worth a brief stop on the way. Immediately inland from Almirídha you pass below **Aspró**, a tiny, ancient hamlet looking down over the coast. This is the old Greek village as you've always imagined it; a handful of lucky foreigners have snapped up the only empty houses but as real estate prices soar it seems only a matter of time before the remaining local residents decide to cash-in, too. **Doulianá**, a couple of kilometres southwest of Aspró as the crow flies but a few more along the back roads you're forced to take to reach it, is another delightful hamlet overflowing with plants and flowers and criss-crossed by winding lanes where time seems to stand still. There's a pleasant **taverna** here too, *Ta Doulianá*, with a leafy terrace serving some great local dishes such as *arní avgolémono* (lamb with lemon and egg sauce).

Gavalohóri, 2km south of Aspró, has a particularly outstanding attraction in the shape of a small but excellent **folklore museum** (daily 9am–8pm; €2; when closed, enquire at the women's co-operative mentioned below) housed in a beautifully restored Venetian building with Turkish additions. The history and culture of the village is documented in the various rooms, with items clearly labelled in English as well as Greek. Of special interest are the examples of stone-cutting, woodcarving and **kopanéli** (silk lace made by bobbin-weaving), which is now being revived in the village. The mulberry trees planted around the village by the Turks still produce silk from the silkworms that feed on their leaves – although the worms themselves are now imported from Japan and China. Evidence that this is an ancient settlement is scattered throughout the village's narrow, winding streets: there are Byzantine wells and Roman tombs on the outskirts, and on the corner by the museum you can see the cleverly preserved remains of a Turkish coffee-shop with inscriptions and old jars. In the central square there is a store run by the Women's Agrotourism Co-operative, an organization dedicated to reviving many of the disappearing arts and crafts of the region; the results of their work – glass, ceramics and *kopanéli* – are on sale. They also have a number of good-value country **apartments** sleeping up to four to rent for stays of two days or more, with three rooms and TV (Ⓣ28250 22038; ④). The village **taverna**, *Aposperitis*, is also good and is sited at the beginning of the Vámos road on the right.

Vámos

Vámos itself is hard to miss – the roads converge here, and from all over the region signs direct you to the local health centre. Only size really distinguishes it from all the other villages, however, and the *kafenía* round the crossroads are as peaceful as any you'll find.

An interesting venture here is Vámos S.A., a co-operative founded with the goal of promoting eco-tourism and rebuilding and restoring houses in the village. They currently have a good **taverna** near the centre of the village, *I Sterna Tou Bloumosifi*; a little further up the main street, *Marouvas* is also good. The co-operative also has its own **café-bar**, *To Liakoto* (around the corner from the taverna), with spectacular terrace views and next door, a grocery store selling beautifully packaged cheeses, herbs, honey, oil and wine from the region. They have recently added an **art gallery** opposite the taverna and there's even a travel agency and **tourist office** (30m from the taverna up a road opposite; Ⓣ28250 23251, Ⓦwww.vamossa.gr) which provides information (and a village **map**), rents out their rooms offers motorcycle and mountain bike rentals, in addition to organizing **walks** to Byzantine monasteries and churches nearby. If you're tempted **to stay** the travel agency has a variety of rooms, apartments and guest houses to rent, all in carefully restored traditional houses and all very comfortably equipped with bath, TV and cooking facilities plus, in some, luxuries like Jacuzzis, steam bath or a pool (Ⓣ28250 23250, Ⓦwww.vamossa.gr; ③–⑧). While you're here, make sure to see the upper part of the village, which is where most of the population lives, as it is easy to get the idea that the co-operative's half is all there is.

Heading on from Vámos towards Yeoryioúpolis, at **Kálamitsi Amigdáli**, 5km southwest, another women's craft co-operative has been set up, weaving silk to sell. Watch out for signs directing you to the workshop as you drive through, or check at the local *kafenío*, further along the road on the right.

Vrísses

Vrísses, on the south side of the E75 highway, was a major junction on the old road and is still the crossroads for the route south to Hóra Sfakíon. If you're coming from Réthimnon or anywhere else to the east, you usually have to **change buses** here. Set on the banks of the Almirós (or Trís Almíri) river, Vrísses is a wonderfully shady little town, its streets lined with huge old plane trees. On the riverside are a couple of inviting **tavernas** on either side of a bridge with tables under the trees. Just south from here and near to a monument to the independence settlement of 1898, *Gefira* is a pleasant **Internet** café reached via steps. Plenty of smaller cafés line the main street, many of them offering good local honey and yoghurt said to be the best on the island. There are also **rooms**, should you want one, though they're not desperately attractive.

Heading back towards the coast from Vrísses, the road cuts under the E75 once again, following the river valley down to Yeoryioúpolis. This is another lovely stretch, through well-watered fields and woods. About halfway you can pull over to a picnic spot shaded by cypress trees, with a whitewashed chapel by the roadside, fresh spring water and huge picnic tables.

About 4km along the road to Hóra Sfakíon, and worth a look if you're passing, the village of **Alíkambos** lies just off the road. In the nave of its **church of the Panayía** there are outstanding **frescoes** by the fourteenth-century master, Ioánnis Pagomenos; they depict the Virgin and Child, Áyios Yeóryios and Áyios Dimítrios, and are remarkably well preserved, which is surprising in view of the way the locals prod them vigorously with their fingers when pointing out images or the names of the saints. The paintings around the altar are by a later artist. The church lies down a track off to the left just before the village and near a Venetian fountain. Should you miss the unsigned turn-off, the *kafenío* in the village square, fronted by a couple of unexploded bombs from World War II, will provide directions. At Máza, 3km northeast of here, there's another frescoed church, although this is not quite so good nor as well preserved. The rest of the route south to Hóra Sfakíon is covered on pp.363–365.

Yeoryioúpolis

YEORYIOÚPOLIS (or Georgioupolis) lies at the base of Cape Dhrápano where the Almirós flows into the sea. It's named after the ill-starred Prince George, a son of the Greek king who was appointed High Commissioner to Crete in 1898 (see p.425). Like Vrísses it's a beautiful old place, with a tree-lined approach and ancient eucalyptuses shading the huge square in the centre. Equally scenic is the area around the bridge over the river estuary, below which fishing boats tie up and fishermen mend their nets. Unlike Vrísses it's now an established resort, although on a small enough scale to remain an extremely pleasant place to spend a few days.

Arrival and information

Buses drop you on the main road, just a couple of minutes' walk from the square and crossroads at the centre of town – a roadside booth here sells tickets for onward buses. Heading up towards the square from the highway, there are a couple of **banks** with ATMs, and also **travel agents** and **car rental** places: Geo Travel (Ⓣ28250 61091) is good, as is the large Ethon Tours on the square (Ⓣ28250 61269), which has everything from mountain bike hire to its own ATM. These places will also **exchange money**, and offer a range of excursions from **horse-rid-**

△ Yeoryioúpolis

ing (book direct on ⓣ28250 61745; around €30 for two hours) to the Samariá Gorge trip.

There are minimarkets liberally scattered around and a couple of slightly larger supermarkets, including handy Kafkalas right on the square; you can buy English books and **newspapers** at NewsStand, just off the square on the road out. There are **cardphone** kiosks on the square and elsewhere, and expensive **Internet** access is available at *Planet Internet Café* (9.30am–5am) on the edge of the square towards the river (see *Cafe Bar East Garden*, p.331, for a cheaper option). An excellent bakery, *To Pikantiko*, selling the usual *tirópita* and *spanakópita* as well as filled croissants and other temptations, is on the road from the square (by *Mythos Taverna*) down to the beach. Another good bakery is on the road heading out towards Kournás.

If you want to do some **walking** in the area, *Six Walks in the Georgioupolis Area* by Lance Chilton is a great little guide to getting into the local countryside; it comes with an accompanying route map and may be available from shops in the village, but you're best getting hold of it in advance (see "Books" in Contexts, p.462). As a taster, you could try hiking up the Almirós valley towards Vrísses or tackling the steep climb to Exópolis on the road to Vámos, where there are some wonderfully sited tavernas with magnificent views. Hikes to and around Lake Kournás (see p.331) are another possibility. Lazier tours of the area are offered by a small **land train** that transports visitors along the sea front and to various places of interest inland including the lake, and even as far as Argiroúpolis (p.251). Tickets and information can be obtained from a hut by the sea-front *Taverna Edem*.

Accommodation

There are **rooms** to rent everywhere, it seems, and only at the height of season are you likely to have any trouble finding a vacancy; even then you should be all right if you arrive early in the day. The amount of competition keeps prices low. Some of the better places to stay, the first to fill up in high season, are to the right from the square, down the lanes that head towards the beach. Other rooms are to be found off the west (or inland) side of the square. Across the river are a few more secluded and tranquil alternatives. **Mosquitoes** can be a problem here, but the wildlife on the banks is some compensation and kingfishers are regular visitors. With your own transport, the hill village of nearby **Exópolis** becomes a viable alternative to staying in town.

Andy's Rooms Along the beach road from the south end of the square by the supermarket ⓣ28250 61394. Friendly place shaded by trees where good-value balcony rooms have ceiling fans, fridge and wall safe. Also has some well-equipped a/c studios and apartments. ③–⑤

Anna Excellent-value balcony en-suite rooms in a garden setting, with kitchenette, just across the river; they have recently added a new complex 200m further along the same road with fully equipped apartments sleeping up to six (⑦–⑧) around a full-size pool. Info for both at Anna Market, between the square and the bridge. ⓣ28250 61376, Ⓕ28250 61094. ①

Hotel Drosia Off the west side of the main square ⓣ28250 61326, Ⓔhoteldrosia@yahoo.gr. Good-value a/c hotel rooms with balcony, tea- and coffee-making facilities, fridge and safe-deposit box in a leafy setting. ②

Rooms Eleftheria Slightly upriver from the bridge ⓣ28250 61403. Pleasant newish place with a variety of a/c balcony rooms with kitchenette and some apartments (⑤) sleeping up to four. ②

Georgioupolis Beach Hotel On the sea front at the bottom of the road from the north corner of the square ⓣ28250 61056, Ⓔgeobehot@otenet.gr. Good value considering the location and facilities – a/c rooms with satellite TV, minibar, hair driers and the like, plus a pool. ⑤

Rooms Irene Beyond *Andy's Rooms* ⓣ28250 61278. Pleasant en-suite rooms with balcony and fridge near the sea (a few with a view) with friendly eponymous proprietor; fans provided on request. ③

Marika Studio Apartments Above the main road in the hill village of Exópolis, 3km northwest of town ⓣ28250 61500 or 28210 75241, Ⓔmarika-hotel@yahoo.gr. With your own transport, this attractive option with studio rooms around a pool and a truly spectacular view becomes a possibility. In high season you'd be advised to ring ahead (though Marika speaks no English) as it has now been discovered by tour operators. ③

Papadakis Apartments Close to the church near *Andy's Rooms* and behind the beach ⓣ28250 61618, ⓔpapadakis@cha.forthnet.gr. Attractive new garden studio complex where airy rooms come equipped with fridge, kitchenette and balcony sea views. ⑤

Pilot Beach Hotel On the beach 2km east of town and reached via the E75 highway ⓣ28250 61901, ⓦwww.pilot-beach.gr. Yeoryioúpolis's flagship luxury hotel is cut in two by the highway, with its own tunnel underneath: sea-front location, pools, restaurants, kids' club, extensive sports facilities and well-appointed a/c rooms and bungalows, but the traffic noise is potentially a blight. ⑧–⑨

Rent Rooms Stelios On a cross street off the road towards *Andy's* ⓣ & ⓕ28250 61308. Balcony a/c rooms with fridge and kitchenette off a plant-packed patio, and others in nearby houses. Also has some slightly more expensive apartments (③) sleeping up to four. ②

River House Across the river near to the *Anna* ⓣ28250 61531, ⓔNikossp6@otenet.gr. Studios with a/c, sea-view balcony and kitchenette upstairs or inland-facing en-suite rooms with fridge in a building surrounded by a pretty garden. ②–③

Rooms Voula Just off the square's southern end ⓣ28250 61359. Economical en-suite rooms above a souvenir store, which also allows use of a kitchen. ②

Zorba's Taverna Close to the square on the road towards *Andy's* ⓣ28250 61381, ⓦwww.zorbas-geo.com. Larger than average a/c rooms and apartments above a taverna. The rooms come with kitchenette, the family apartments with a complete kitchen. ③–⑤

The harbour and beaches

The main course of the river runs into the Gulf of Almirós on the northern edge of Yeoryioúpolis, by a small harbour protected by a long rocky breakwater, and there are numerous smaller streams running into the sea all around. The harbour is used by the local fishing fleet and when they return in the early morning you can often purchase a couple of *fagrí* for the pan straight from the fisherman. This area is another favoured nesting ground of the loggerhead **sea turtle** (see p.257), and "turtle trips" up the river (actually to visit colonies of their diminutive relatives, the terrapin) can be taken from a **watersports** hut on the beach at the mouth of the river, where they also hire pedalos and kayaks. For other **boat trips** – such as a day's outing to Maráthi (p.321) at the mouth of Soúdha Bay – there's a booth by the bridge, or details from the boats themselves, tied up on the river below.

The town **beach** heads off to the south, curving round to join the continuous stretch which runs alongside the Réthimnon road for miles. Close to town it shelves very gently and enjoys the protection of the breakwater, and is popular with Greek families. Showers are provided at intervals. At the far end there are new hotels and beach bars, but there are also **dangerous currents** offshore: don't venture too far out, and take heed of any warning notices on the beach. Windsurfers can be rented by the *El Dorado* hotel. Streams crossing the beach create little quicksands in places (only knee-deep), but most of these have wooden bridges to let you cross without getting your feet wet.

A second, much more sheltered, **beach** lies to the north of the river in a small bay. Swimming here is safer and there are generally fewer people, but the water can be extremely cold, owing to the rivers emptying at each end of the sand. There are a couple of simple bar/tavernas behind this beach. At the far end, beyond the smaller stream, you can follow a path over sharp rocks, past an old chapel and various caves, but in the end it leads only to more sharp rocks and eventually peters out above the cliffs.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Restaurants and tavernas in Yeoryioúpolis are concentrated round the square, or close to it, and there are plenty to choose from; the square itself is ringed by cafés in which to sit over a long drink, watching the world go by. If you make it up to the hill village of **Exópolis** there are a number of tavernas there too, all with stunning views over the coast.

In terms of **nightlife**, Yeoryioúpolis is very quiet indeed. There are plenty of **bars** – the cafés around the square all serve cocktails and play music at night – but the discos and the open-air cinema are long gone. For now, the highlights of local entertainment are the Tuesday-night live **Cretan music** shows at the *Georgioupolis Beach Hotel*, and the floodlit **minigolf** and children's play area at the *Café Friendly*, on the right along the beach road.

Anna On the square. Juices, snacks and drinks, with live TV sport.

Arkadi Towards the mouth of the river on the far bank. Not surprisingly given the location, fish is the speciality here.

Taverna Babis On the first corner of the road leading down towards the beach from the square. Good value, simple Cretan food.

Café-Bar East Garden next to *Anna* Market on the main street. A new relaxing café with a garden at the rear for breakfast or drinks. Also has a couple of Internet screens with lower rates than others in town.

Edem Taverna Right on the sea front. A somewhat bland international menu is made up for by one of the best locations in town and a free pool for clients.

O Fanis Near the bridge. Taverna that's particularly good for fish.

Café-Bar Georgioupolis On the square. A good place for breakfast or for a drink at any time of day.

Taverna Georgis Right on the edge of the village by the E75. Excellent meat and fish dishes cooked on a charcoal fire or in a wood-fired oven; it's set slightly back from the street, approached through a bower, and not to be confused with the dreary place next door.

Mythos In the northeast corner of the square. One of the town's better tavernas, if a little pricey.

Taverna Paradise Down by the river west of the square. Simple taverna food served in an attractive garden.

Taverna Platia Just off the square by *Rooms Voula*. Good, inexpensive food, though not a terribly attractive setting.

Taverna Poseidon Down an alley from the road south of the square, in a lovely riverside setting, and serving "every day fish from our own boat". Eves only.

Sirtaki Between the square and the bridge. A pleasant *ouzerí* serving excellent *mezédhes* under a vine trellis.

Lake Kournás

Crete's only freshwater lake, **Lake Kournás**, shelters in a bowl of hills 4km inland from Yeoryioúpolis. As lakes go, it's small and shallow, but it nevertheless makes for an interesting afternoon's excursion. The appearance of the lake varies greatly according to when you visit: during the day its colours change remarkably as the sun shifts around the rim of the bowl, and its size alters over the course of a year. In late summer the level drops to reveal sand (or dried mud) beaches all around, and a number of popular camping spots. Earlier in the year, the water comes right up to the tidal ring of scrubby growth and it's much harder to find anywhere to camp or to swim from. The lake and the hills around it are also a good place to seek out some of the more unusual island wildlife (see p.455). In summer it's possible to make a circuit of the lake using a path and the dried mud beaches where this runs out, about an hour's walk.

To get to the lake from Yeoryioúpolis you could take the touristy land train, hire a bike, or it's an easy walk, pleasant enough once you've crossed the E75 highway. The best route is via the hamlet of **Mathés**, where the *Taverna Mathes* has a fine terrace with a great view and daily specials such as braised lamb in wine. Fifty metres uphill from here the delightful *Taverna Villa Kapasa* (☎28250 61050, Ⓦwww.villa-kapasas.com; ③) offers air-conditioned en-suite rooms overlooking the leafy garden of an ancient restored house; they also do meals. From Mathés there's a waymarked rambling route to the lake's northern edge, linking in nicely with the route around it mentioned above – ask the villagers at Mathés to direct you to the path, should you have difficulty.

On the lakeshore where you arrive there are a few simple **tavernas** – popular with the locals for outings, with lamb barbecued on spits – and a few pedaloes and canoes for rent. Most of these tavernas have en-suite **rooms** upstairs overlooking the water, including the superbly sited *Korissia* at the north end of the lake (☎28250 61653; ③), where balcony lake-view rooms come with air conditioning and TV: very comfortable if you have insect-repellent protection. If these are full, you could try for rooms at the village of Mourí, which is straight up from the junction with the path that leads down to the lake.

The village of **Kournás** is another 4km beyond the lake, a stiff climb which reveals a charming hill settlement fanning out around its inclined main street. Studio **rooms** are available at *Villa Stella* (☎28250 96280; ⑤), on the right coming in from the lake, but as the proprietor lives off-site you'll need to make contact in advance. In high summer you may not find a room here, but one place definitely worth a lunch stop is the *Kali Kardia* **taverna** at the top of the main street. Here some of the best lamb and sausages in the province are cooked up, together with tasty *souvláki* and super salads – and don't forget to try their noted *galaktoboúreko* dessert, a lemony egg-custard pudding. After you've eaten you could take a look at the church of **Áyios Yeóryios**, downhill and signed to the right from the square. A fine old Byzantine structure with Venetian additions, it has some impressive fresco fragments. If it's locked, enquiries nearby should produce a key.

South of Haniá: Venizélos country

With a day to spare, the country behind Haniá – a small agricultural plain into which the precipitous foothills of the White Mountains intrude – deserves exploration, especially if you're prepared to embark on some serious **hiking**. For the most part oranges are grown here, which are the best in Crete and hence, as any local will tell you, the finest in the world. Many of the villages are also associated with **Eleftheríos Venizélos**, the revered Cretan statesman who, as prime minister of Greece for most of the period from 1910 to 1932, finally brought Crete into the modern Greek nation.

Being located so close to Haniá, you would think that this would be a deservedly well-trodden hiking zone, but – as is often the case on the island – the infrastructure (places to stay, waymarked routes) is lacking. For the time being it remains a picturesque, but isolated rural farming zone well off the conventional tourist trail.

Thériso

Perhaps the most attractive journey is the fourteen-kilometre drive up to **Thériso**, one of the cradles of Cretan independence and hometown of Venizélos's mother. Here in 1905 the Revolutionary Assembly was held (all baggy black shirts and drooping moustaches, as depicted in so many Cretan museums) that ousted Prince George and did much to precipitate union with Greece. The trip out to the little house, with its plaque commemorating the famous son, is an all but obligatory one for Cretans, and the village is frequently crowded with busloads of battling schoolkids. There's actually little to see apart from a traditional country village, rather sombre in atmosphere if the truth be told, but it's worth going anyway for the drive up **Thériso Gorge**. In terms of spectacle this can't, of course, compare with Samariá and, in any case, the bed of the ravine is given over to the road. But it is exceedingly pretty in the lower reaches, gentle and winding with the stream crossed and recrossed on concrete bridges, and surprisingly craggy towards the top where the walls are cracked and pocked with caves. A handful of (usually empty) **tavernas** in the village cater for those visitors who decide to hang around after seeing the monuments. Try *Madáras* (near the Venizélos house), which is probably the best of the bunch.

Mesklá

The drive south from Thériso is a heady climb into the foothills of the mountains and over what feels like an impressively lofty ridge. This road is narrow, rocky and it's not always obvious which way to go, but it's not too bad a drive. Alternatively, the route makes a wonderful long **hike**, occasionally traversed by organized rambling groups but quite possible on your own – as long as you check the route beforehand, ask the way if in doubt, and check bus times to get you home again. There are **buses** to both Thériso and Mesklá from Haniá, and the walk between the two – with spectacular mountain views – takes less than three hours. Given the vagaries of the timetable, though, the trip is liable to take all day if you do it by bus.

Right at the top lies **Soúrva**, a cluster of whitewashed houses with stupendous views over the surrounding valleys. There's nothing to do here – a lone *kafenío* is all there is to detain you – but it is a marvellous setting. From Soúrva the way spirals slowly down to **Mesklá**, another beautiful village, set on a swift-flowing brook and surrounded by lush agricultural land and orange groves; there are several small café/tavernas here as well as a basic **pension**, *Ta Levka Ori* (①). A particularly good place to eat is the *Taverna Manolis & Kostoula Halari*, at the top end of the village beyond the modern church, with fine home cooking and many homegrown ingredients.

Under the Venetians, Mesklá was a place of considerably more importance than it is now, as indicated by the tiny chapel of **Metamórphosis Sotírou** (Transfiguration of the Saviour), which lies at the bottom of the village, a turn up to the left if you are approaching from the Fournés end. The chapel itself is unprepossessing, but inside are preserved the remains of fourteenth-century **frescoes**: many of the paintings have been severely damaged by damp and mould, but parts remain clearly visible and are all the more remarkable for their ordinary surroundings. At the top of the village there's another chapel dedicated to the **Panayía** (next to a large modern church of the same name) which was constructed in the fourteenth century over a basilica of the fifth century which had, in its turn, been raised over a Roman temple to Aphrodite: yet another Cretan holy place which has attracted worshippers for well over two millennia to precisely the same spot. The Roman mosaic floor that had served all three shrines was recently removed to protect and preserve it. Enquiries in the village should produce a key if you wish to see the interior.

Mesklá was also the centre of one of the great legends of Cretan resistance, the **Kandanoleon revolt**. According to the story (which is certainly not historically accurate, though it probably has some basis in fact), much of western Crete rose against the Venetians early in the sixteenth century. They elected as their leader one George Kandanoleon, who established a base in Mesklá and from here ran a rebel administration, collecting taxes and effectively controlling much of the west. It was only by treachery that he was finally brought to heel. In order to legitimize his authority, Kandanoleon arranged for his son to marry the daughter of a Venetian aristocrat, Francesco Molini (see p.395). The marriage took place and the celebrations began, with Kandanoleon and several hundred of his supporters eating and drinking themselves into a stupour – at which point, by pre-arranged signal, a Venetian army arrived and captured the Cretans as they slept. Their leaders were hanged at villages around the countryside, and the revolt was over.

Fournés and Mourniés

Continuing on foot you could tackle the steep climb to Lákki (see p.343) on the main road to Omalós and the Samariá Gorge. The road, however, and the direct route to Haniá, heads down to **Fournés** and joins the Haniá–Omalós road there. Fournés is a very much larger place, with stores lining the road (good for stocking up if you're doing this circuit in reverse), heavily cultivated fields round about and a large producers' co-operative. Beyond Fournés the road to Haniá passes the Ayiá reservoir and bird sanctuary (see opposite).

If you want to complete your Venizélos pilgrimage you should also visit **Mourniés**, where the great man was born in 1864. Immediately south of Haniá, this is easiest reached by heading out towards the main E75 highway. Mourniés is just a couple of kilometres southwest off this and, Venizélos's birthplace aside, has little to see, but it's another pleasant drive out of the city, along a road lined with ancient plane trees.

The coast west of Haniá

West from Haniá, the new E75 is fast and dull, speeding you towards Kastélli with little to see along the way. The **old road**, meanwhile, follows the coastline more or less consistently, through a string of small towns and growing resorts, all the way to the base of the Rodhópou peninsula. Occasionally it runs right above the water, more often 100m or so inland, but never more than easy walking distance from the sea. The coastal route is well served by buses, running every thirty minutes between Haniá and Kolimbári from early morning to late evening. As always, though, you'll really need your own transport to explore the remoter areas **inland**.

In the early stages the various villages have merged into an almost continuous string of ribbon development – not exactly ugly, but not particularly attractive either. There are villas, hotels and sporadic pensions or rooms to rent all the way, though little in the budget range, and vacancies are scarce in season. As you leave the city behind, this development thins, giving way between towns to orange groves protected from the *meltémi* by calamus-reed windbreaks, where only the occasional path penetrates down to the sea. There is **beach** of sorts almost all the way, though much is windswept, dirty and subject to crashing breakers; for secure swimming you're better off closer to Haniá – at the city beach of Kalamáki, at **Ayía Marína** or at **Plataniás**.

This coastline was the scene of the fiercest fighting in the **Battle of Crete**, and the bridgehead from which the Germans established their domination. There are various reminders of this history along the way, although the aggressive **swooping eagle** that used to dominate the road as it left Haniá, erected by the Germans as a memorial to the paratroops who fell at Máleme, has recently been destroyed – "by lightning", according to a diplomatic tourist-office official. After decades of benign neglect the monument's giant plinth bearing a paean to the dead soldiers and the Third Reich has now also been attacked and daubed with anti-Nazi slogans, and it may not be long before this too disappears. Along this first stretch of coast the town beaches are ranged (p.311), though the road here actually veers a little away from the sea. Frequent minor roads run either down to the beach or up into the hills, where there are some pleasant villas and small hotels looking down over the coastline, and a great deal of development going on.

Galatás and the Ayía reservoir

Villages like Dharátsos, **Galatás** and places even less well defined, seem thoroughly unattractive as you drive along the main road, but in most cases there is a real village, up in the hills inland. Galatás actually turns out to be a fair-sized place, in whose village hall is a tiny, one-room **Battle of Crete museum**, basically a collection of rusty guns and helmets (officially Mon–Fri 9am–1pm, but not always open). Outside is a memorial to those who died here, including 145 New Zealand soldiers. *Barbayiannis*, on Platía Maíou 1941 opposite, is a good place for a snack if you're passing.

Four kilometres to the southwest of Galatás village, **Ayía reservoir** is renowned for its **birdlife**. With the aid of EU funding some unsightly old factory buildings have been removed and replaced by a couple of upmarket and rather incongruous cafés, the music from which often disturbs the birdlife. Nevertheless, the watery marshland is home to a rich variety of species, including crakes, avocet, marsh harrier, spotted flycatcher and squacco heron in season. The kingfishers are a particular delight and not at all put off their diving tricks by human visitors. Terrapins, too, are residents here and when not squelching around in the marshy pools they can often be spotted sunning themselves on a raised mud bank. The sanctuary is under the protection of LIFE (an environmental arm of the EU) although to date there is no sign of the promised reception centre or walking trails or hides (though there seems so much birdlife at almost any time of year that a hide is scarcely necessary). The best sightings should be in the early morning or a couple of hours before dusk; binoculars are helpful. The reservoir is clearly signed ("Limni–Lake") off the main Haniá-to-Omalós road near the centre of Ayía village. The road past the entrance (some 300m along on the right) continues to Kirtomádhos, from where you can follow an easily driveable dirt road back to the coast at Plataniás.

Ayía Marína and Plataniás

Kalamáki, where the road finally comes in sight of the beach, marks the limit of the local bus service from Haniá and also the end of this strip of sand. Beyond, low hills drop straight to the sea round a couple of bends and then you emerge at Káto Stalós, which runs into **Ayía Marína**, the first substantial village along this stretch. In fact, there's virtually no break in the development from Káto Stalós to Plataniás, creating the most built-up strip in the west of the island, with stores, restaurants, hotels, rooms for rent, travel agents, tavernas, discos and bike rental places coming one after the other. This is better than it sounds: it's all fairly low-rise, there's a decent beach almost all the way along (with facilities including jet skis, windsurfers and parascending) and, by resort standards, it's all pretty quiet.

Ayía Marína's coastal half – the older village lies a little inland – is distinguished by a small brick factory and a beautiful beach, curving round a little promontory with a fine view of the sunset and of **Áyii Theódori**. This little island not far offshore is now a sanctuary for *kri-kri* or wild goats (you're not allowed to land here). From the west of the islet a great cave gapes like the jaws of a beast; indeed, legend has Áyii Theódori as a sea-monster which, emerging from the depths to swallow Crete, was petrified by the gods. Remains found in the cave suggest that it was a place of Minoan worship in antiquity, while in more recent times the Venetians turned the whole island into a fortress against the threat of piracy and Turkish invasion. There's a wonderfully old-fashioned **rooms** place right on the beach in the centre of Ayía Marína, *Katerina Studios* (☎28210 68333; ④): if there's a vacancy, these simple, en-suite rooms are good value considering their location. *Katerina* also has more modern air-conditioned apartments with TV next door, ranged around a pool (⑤). There's every facility and tour you could want on offer here – one of the more unusual is Hellas Bike (Ⓣ28210 60858) which, as well as regular bike hire, runs easy **bike tours** around this zone and into the mountains. They do the hard work by trucking the bikes up the ascents, leaving you to freewheel down. A trip to the Lefká Óri (White Mountains) costs around €52 all in.

Plataniás

Heading west from Ayía Marína, **Plataniás** follows seamlessly, boasting a delightful old quarter perched high on an almost sheer bluff above the road. **Parking** is a pain – rather than spend time searching for a parking place or getting a ticket, it's easier to use the metered parking lot in the centre of town near the post office. There are a number of **tavernas** that attract evening and weekend trippers from Haniá, notably ★ *O Milos tou Kerata*, a restaurant of repute towards the west end of the village (eves only; expensive by Cretan standards but worth it; Ⓣ28210 68578). Specialities here, and elsewhere in the village, are *yíros* and *kokorétsi* – meat or offal cooked on huge spits over charcoal – but the *Milos* has extra attractions in the form of an old millstream which runs through a walled garden where you eat. The best locations, though, are the eagle's eyries right at the top of the village, where the *Vigli* taverna and friendly *Astrea* have spectacular, vertigo-inducing terraces with views over the coast that make the climb well worth the sweat. Another worthwhile place, in a riverside setting some 3.5km inland, is the ★ *Taverna Drakiana* (Ⓣ28210 61677) near the tiny church of Áyios Yioryíos; both are well signed and most easily reached on the dirt road that runs inland past *O Milos*.

Should you want to stay, you'll find a number of **rooms** places along the main street – try the pleasant *Anna* (Ⓣ28210 68748; ③) near the *Milos* taverna at the west end of town for en-suite rooms with a garden view, or the similarly priced *Hotel Filoxenia* (Ⓣ28210 68502, ⒺHotel_Filoxenia@hotmail.com; ③) a little further east. In the same area and near the main square *Rooms Katerina* (Ⓣ28210 68710, Ⓔkaterinarooms@hotmail.com; ④–⑤) has beachfront air-conditioned studios and apartments with fridge and TV; it's reached down a signed lane on the seaward side of the road. Other places to stay are mainly seafront apartments booked long in advance for the July–August peak by package operators or holidaymakers from Haniá. Outside these times enquire at any of the travel agents along the main street who should be able to arrange a deal. Otherwise, the main street, which has everything you need: as well as a **post office**, numerous **banks** (with ATMs) and **supermarkets** there's also even an open-air **cinema**, The Garden, showing films in English. Local travel agents offer all the usual tours, or there's a mini-train that sets off daily on a number of extraordinarily ambitious, two and a half hour tours of the surrounding countryside.

Whatever its other attractions, for most young people in Haniá, Plataniás means **clubs** and **discos**, and a great exodus from the city takes place in summer at around midnight when the clubs here begin to lift off (there are frequent police checks for drink-driving in the early hours of the morning). The most central, on the main road almost opposite *O Milos*, is *Utopia*, with Indiana Jones–inspired decor where inebriates are encouraged to cross a rope bridge suspended high above the ground; by day there's a beachfront music bar here with pool, and a scene all of its own. Similar places line the beach road here, including *Iguana*, *Mylos Club* and *Neromylos* and the scene in Ayía Marína includes *Divine, Island* and *Figaro* among others. Further out, on the east edge of Plataniás, *Rock House* has a playlist comprising rock classics.

From Yeráni to Tavronítis

Beyond Plataniás, things change little all the way to the Rodhópou peninsula, though signs of tourism get fewer the further you go, with lots of isolated villas and one or two slightly more concentrated developments in places such as **Yeráni**. These on the whole are pleasantly low-key, but the beach is rarely that great, being very open to wind and waves and with rather gravelly, grey sand. Frequent paths and tracks lead down from the road to the sea.

Máleme is perhaps the place you're most likely to stop. Just beyond lies the airfield that saw much of the early fighting in the Battle of Crete and where the German invasion began on May 20, 1941; the loss of this airfield in controversial circumstances was crucial to the German success. Although no longer a base it's still a restricted military zone, but the soldiers on guard duty don't seem to mind if you wander just inside the gate to have a peek. Slightly before the airfield, the giant *Creta Princess* luxury hotel (Ⓣ28210 627023, Ⓦwww.louishotels.com; ⑧ with breakfast) lies to the right of the road, dominating the only bit of sandy beach around. If you're feeling brazen you can walk through to this: the hotel also has a pool and a couple of bars in luxurious grounds.

Almost directly opposite the hotel, a narrow lane leads up to the **German war cemetery**, set on a hillside below the ridge known as Hill 107, which played a crucial role in the defence of, and the battle for, the airfield. Overlooking the battleground where so many of the four and a half thousand buried here lost their lives, the lines of flat headstones, each marking a double grave, lend a sombre aspect to an otherwise peaceful scene. In a piece of almost grotesque irony, the cemetery's keepers were for many years George Psychoundákis, author of *The Cretan Runner*, and Manóli Pateráki, who played a leading role in the capture of General Kreipe (see p.427). When offered the job, Psychoundákis was allegedly told, "You looked after the Germans while they were alive, why not look after them now they're dead?"

In a bizarre twist of fate, the discovery in 1966 of a splendid **Late Minoan tomb** nearby demonstrated that this area had already been a graveyard for over three thousand years. To reach it, follow the lane leading down from the cemetery to the first left bend, where a track (signed) on the right leads 100m along a terraced hillside to the tomb, again on the right. The *dhrómos* or entrance passage of the stone-built tomb and its heavy lintel are well preserved.

There's a final reminder of Máleme's significance in the Battle of Crete as you cross the River Tavronítis on a long modern bridge: beside it, twin pontoon bridges survive from the war. **Tavronítis** itself is still a traditional farming centre, with fruit for sale at stalls beside the road; it marks the junction with the road across the island to Paleohóra (see p.386).

Kolimbári

Continuing west, **Kolimbári**, at the base of the Rodhópou peninsula, has far more appeal than anything that has preceded it along this coast. If there were a sandy beach, it would be a perfect resort: as it is, there's a long strip of pebbles and clear water looking back along the coast towards Haniá in the distance. It's little spoiled, and behind the narrow main street with a few tavernas, you can walk through to a concrete sea-front promenade lined with more tavernas. The old harbour here is all but deserted now that a huge new concrete one has been built just beyond town: from here there are daily boat trips in season (10am departure; Ⓣ6972323223) up the peninsula to Diktynna (p.340).

The place is tranquil despite these stirrings of development and, should you want to stay, there are quite a few places in the main village offering **rooms**: near the sea you could try *Irini Beach* (Ⓣ28240 22534; ③) with air-conditioned, balcony, sea-view rooms. The most attractive option, however, is *Apartments Ariadne* (Ⓣ28210 74191 or 6945232288, Ⓦwww.travel-hania-crete.com; ⑤) in the higher village, where air-conditioned studios share the leafy terrace of a tastefully renovated mansion with fine views. The same proprietor rents a number of equally inviting villas nearby. The higher village is the old Venetian quarter and is reached by ascending the long road uphill from the main street near the post office. Assistance in **finding a room** is also to be had from Elyros Travel (☎28240 83088), with an office on the junction near the *Lefka* taverna (see below).

A good place for a drink or snack is *Mylos*, a stylish café-bar converted from an old olive-oil mill, with a pleasant sea-front terrace. The best **tavernas** in the village are ★ *Argentina* (☎28240 22243), with a great street terrace (although they've recently added a sea-front extension across the road) and ★ *Diktina* (☎28240 22611), almost opposite each other on the main street. The latter's terrace is at the back with tables overlooking the old harbour. Both places offer excellent fish and meat dishes and efficient service; *Diktina*, however, has the better (bottled) wine list and plays some cool jazz background sounds as the evening progresses. More fish tavernas also cluster around the eastern end of the sea-front – *Palio Arkhontiko* (with another good wine list) comes recommended – and at the top of what used to be a 500-metre-long avenue lined with magnificent plane trees, separating the village from its junction on the main road: in a breathtaking act of municipal vandalism the planes were all felled to allow the road to be widened into the soulless asphalt highway it has now become (a few new trees have been planted, but they don't amount to much yet). At the junction there's a cluster of hotels, bars, restaurants and shops (including an Inka supermarket) serving the passing trade, as well as a couple of grill tavernas that are favourites with the locals. *Lefka* (☎28240 22211; ②) is reliable and also offers rooms.

The Rodhópou peninsula

The road that extends onto the **Rodhópou peninsula** goes nowhere in particular, petering out into a dirt track beyond **Afráta** and then circling back, but the first part at least is a superb drive. An excellent local website, ⓦwww.cretanvista.gr, has extensive details on the peninsula and local walks and tavernas.

The first stop, **Moní Gonía** (summer Sun–Fri 8am–12.30pm & 4–8pm, Sat 4–8pm; winter Sun–Fri 8am–12.30pm & 3.30–5.30pm, Sat 3.30–5.30pm; free; respectable dress required but clothes are provided at the entrance), is only a short walk from Kolimbári. The monastery occupies a prime site, with stupendous views and a scramble down to what appears to be a sandy cove – rumoured to be the monks' private beach. Founded at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the monastery perhaps has less to show than some, but has stirring tales to tell of resistance to the infidel Turk. Here they can point to the cannonball still lodged in the walls to prove it – a relic they seem far more proud of than any icon. Which is not to say there are none worthwhile: the church has a fine series of post-Byzantine examples dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (plus a few modern ones), of which Áyios Nikólaos, in a side chapel, is particularly fine. More are kept in the small **museum** (€2), along with assorted vestments and relics. Although there are only six monks left, they remain very hospitable and there's even a "tourist monk", Brother Andónios, who has been pointing things out to visitors for years, often treating them – in quieter times – to a glass of *raki* and a look at his treasured stamp collection (all contributions welcome).

Opposite the monastery and beside a fountain, a steep track climbs the cliff in five minutes to the tiny fourteenth-century church that was attached to the original monastery. The church has fragmentary frescoes, and from its terrace there's a wonderful **view** over the monastery itself and the Gulf of Haniá beyond. Just after the monastery is a modern Orthodox academy and from here the road fol-

ΒΛΗΜΑ ΤΟΥΡΚΙΚΟΝ
14 ΙΟΥΝΙΟΥ 1867

△ Cannonball embedded in wall, Moní Gonía

lows the coast for a short way and then begins to climb, hairpinning its way to a dizzy height above the sea before turning inland. The views are magnificent – not only back along the coast you have traversed but also down into the translucent green sea.

Afráta and around

Afráta is a tiny place, little visited, with a few simple *kafenía*. Carry on down the hill past the first two of these and you'll come to *Taverna Roxani*. The charming Roxani speaks no English but, assisted by her husband Alexi, she serves good, simple food in a lovely setting with a shady terrace – try her noted *kalitsoúnia* (cheese pies) followed by the *fagrí* (sea bream) if available, or the rabbit. Below *Roxani*'s, keep right on a paved track which drops steeply, and after little more than 1km you'll reach a rocky cove at the far end of the gorge you can see from the village. The exceptionally clear water here offers great swimming, often with no one else about (although a *kantina* now appears in summer serving snacks and cool drinks), and you'll need to watch out for sea urchins and sharp rocks.

From Afráta, an unsurfaced road is signed to **Astrátigos** and **Áspra Nerá** with a turn-off to the village of **Rodhopós**, all pleasant if unremarkable settlements with opportunities for food and drink stops. This is not too bad a drive, and on the return southward leg, shortly before Áspra Nerá, there's an interesting detour to the village of **Ravdoúha** with a church to see and a few sea-front tavernas. From the village proper, 3km from Áspra Nerá, a switchback road descends to the coast. En route you'll pass the ancient church of **Ayía Marína** with some fine fresco fragments preserved within and an old – and now unused – washing place to the side of it evoking a Crete long gone. When you reach the coast a fork offers two possible directions: to the right leads shortly to three tavernas – one, *Don Rosario* (☎28240 23781), an incongruously upmarket Italian affair run by a retired Italian chef – and a small sea-front jetty where boats are moored close to a small patch of uninviting sand. The left fork is signed to *Braxos To Kyma* ("Wave on the Rock"; ☎28240 23133; ②), a delightful **taverna** fronting a pebble beach shaded by tamarisks, which also has three air-conditioned studio rooms. This is about as far off the beaten track as you can get and, as they prize their tranquility here, if you plan to stay it would be a good idea to give them a ring first. Returning to Áspra Nerá you can rejoin the paved Rodhopós road to head down to the base of the peninsula again.

The tip of the peninsula

Towards the tip of the peninsula you'll find no more driveable roads, though there are a couple of sites you might consider undertaking a major hike or a **boat trip** to reach. The latter is certainly the easier option – in summer the terrain is frighteningly hot, barren and shadeless for walking – especially as there are daily trips from Kolimbári (and occasionally from Haniá) to **Diktynna**, almost at the top of the peninsula above a little bay on the east side. An important Roman sanctuary to the goddess of the same name, this was probably built over more ancient centres of worship, and though it has never been properly excavated there's a surprising amount to be seen. The boats come here mainly because it's a sheltered spot to swim (when the sea is rough, fishing boats often shelter here too), but they allow plenty of time to explore.

It's a challenging hike over to the isolated **Church of Áyios Ioánnis Giónis** on the western side of the peninsula. On August 29 (the commemoration of the death of St John the Baptist), the church plays host to a major pilgrimage and a mass baptism of boys called John, marking one of the most important festivals of the Cretan religious calendar. At this time the two- to three-hour walk (each way) from Rodhopós among crowds of people is definitely worth it. Although you can approach from Afráta, the main path up the spine of the peninsula starts in Rodhopós, which you reach via the first turn off the main road after Kolimbári, and to where there is a very occasional bus (from Kolimbári).

Inland from Kolimbári

A road south from Kolimbári towards Episkopí tracks the valley of the Spiliakos river and offers an opportunity to see an impressive **cave** and a trio of superb **churches**, one of which is unique on the island.

A little over 3km south of Kolimbári is the pleasant rural village of **Spiliá**. On a hill above the village is located the **Cave of Áyios Ioánnis Xénos** (St John the Stranger), a sizeable grotto with a church – dedicated to the eleventh-century evangelist – built inside it. To reach it follow the signs from the centre of the village or consult locals; it's a popular picnicking place with villagers. On the village's southern edge lies the charming fourteenth-century frescoed church of the **Panayía**, raised on the lower slope of a hill and ringed by junipers. Inside, the dark interior is decorated with fine **frescoes** from the same period – a torch is useful to inspect them properly.

Just over 2km to the south of Spiliá and beyond the village of Drakoná, a sign on the right indicates the church of "Holy Stephen". Leave any transport here and follow a wooded path for fifty metres to the **chapel of Áyios Stéfanos**, a tiny tenth-century white-walled chapel squatting beneath overhanging oak trees. It should be open, and inside you'll find the heavy stone walls decorated with exquisite **frescoes** dating from the period following the Arab conquest, when the Christian faith was being triumphantly restored.

The church of Mihaíl Arhángelos Episkopí

A further kilometre towards Episkopí the remarkable church of **Mihaíl Arhángelos Episkopí** is signed to the right. One of the oldest churches in Greece, its concentric stepped **dome** is unique in Crete and gives the structure its local name, "The Rotunda". The church was, as its official name suggests, a bishop's seat during the Venetian period, but the edifice is much older than this. The core rotunda section dates to the first Byzantine period, completed perhaps as early as the sixth century, and originally stood alone; the rest of the building was added after the end of the Arab occupation in the tenth century. Meanwhile, recent excavations

The world's oldest olive tree

Áno Vouves has become famous throughout Crete and Greece as the location of one of the **oldest olive trees in existence**. Now the focus of an ornamental garden funded by the EU, when you reach it, the incredibly gnarled and contorted olive looks every one of the 4000-plus years attributed to it by experts from the University of Crete (the 3000 years quoted on information boards at the site is thought to be a conservative estimate). A piece of living history that has seen the zenith of Minoan Crete and was seriously venerable at the time of Christ, until recently it suffered the indignity of having its hollowed three-metre-diameter trunk used as a dog kennel by the house nearby. Still vigorously producing foliage and fruit, the ancient tree has become a source of fame and pride for Áno Vouves, and the village has now added a **café-information centre** next to the garden to cater to visitors. In 2004 a branch from the tree was carried to Athens by a reconstructed Minoan boat (see p.308) and two victory wreaths fashioned from its leaves were used to honour the first and last winners of events in the Olympic Games. This is set to be repeated in China (hosts for the 2008 games) and London (2012) and looks likely to become an Olympic tradition.

To reach the site, turn right at the Drakoná junction and find your way to Áno (upper) Vouves, a half-kilometre beyond Káto (lower) Vouves. The tree and garden lie up a turning to the left near the centre of the village.

in the adjoining graveyard yielded evidence that the present church was built over the remains of a still earlier Christian basilica, with various layers of burials from all periods of the church's history. Inside are **frescoes** dating back to the tenth century including a poignant fragment with the head and partial wing of Áyios Mihaíl, the church's patron. Take a look also at mosaic floor fragments (thought to date to the earliest period) and an impressive double-seated marble **font**.

Returning to Kolimbári you may want to take a detour at Drakoná to Áno Vouves to see what has now been verified as the **oldest olive tree in Greece** and possibly even the world (see box, p.341).

Sfakiá and the Lefká Óri

South of Haniá loom the **Lefká Óri**, or White Mountains – a formidable barrier to reaching the south of the province. Just a couple of metres short of the highest point of the Psiloritis range (trekkers are building a cairn in an attempt to overtake it), these are in every other way more impressive mountains: barer, craggier and far less tamed. There is just one road into the heart of the area, climbing up to the cold, enclosed plateau of **Omalós**. From here any further progress southwards must be done on foot – and the most spectacular, and spectacularly popular, is the descent through the great cleft of the **Samariá Gorge**. Famous as it is, this is just the largest of a series of ravines by which streams make their escape to the coast. Far less beaten tracks lead, for example, down the **Ímbros ravine** towards Hóra Sfakíon, or from Ayía Iríni to Soúyia. With more preparation you could also go climbing among the peaks – there's a mountaineering hut above Omalós – or undertake an expedition right across the range. Walks also thread their way along the **south coast**, although it's a great deal easier to get around by boat. Regular summer ferries link **Ayía Rouméli**, at the bottom of the Samariá Gorge, with **Loutró** and Hóra Sfakíon; in the other direction, there are slightly less frequent connections to Paleohóra and Soúyia.

Hóra Sfakíon is the capital of this region – **Sfakiá** – which for all its desolation and depopulation is perhaps the most famous, and certainly the most written about, in Crete. It is an area notorious for its fierceness: harsh living conditions, unrelenting weather and warlike people. Most men here, it is claimed, still carry a weapon of some kind concealed about their person. Historically the region was cut off and barbaric, almost a nation apart which, as occupying armies came and went, carried on with life – feuding, rustling, rearing sheep – pretty much regardless. Most of the great tales of Cretan resistance, of *pallikári* fighters and mountain guerrillas, originate in Sfakiá or in Sélinos, west of the mountains. The local version of the Creation reveals much of the Sfakiot spirit. As recounted in Adam Hopkins' book, it begins:

> . . . with an account of all the gifts God had given to other parts of Crete – olives to Ierapetra, Ayios Vasilios and Selinou; wine to Malevisi and Kissamou; cherries to Mylopotamos and Amari. But when God got to Sfakia only rocks were left. So the Sfakiots appeared before Him armed to the teeth. "And us Lord, how are we going to live on these rocks?" and the Almighty, looking at them with sympathy, replied in their own dialect (naturally): "Haven't you got a scrap of brains in your head? Don't you see that the lowlanders are cultivating all these riches for you?"

Stealing was a way of life and so was feuding and revenge – with vendettas on a Sicilian scale continuing well into this century, and occasionally even now (see p.254).

The Venetians had plans to pacify the region, but their castle on the coast at **Frangokástello** was rarely more than an isolated outpost. The Turks did more, imposing taxation on Sfakiá, for example, but they also provoked more violent revenge, notably in the revolt of Dhaskaloyiánnis (see p.361) and many which succeeded it. The mountains were always a safe refuge in which bandits and rebels could conceal themselves while armies took revenge on the lowlands. In World War II Sfakiá resumed this traditional role: when the Germans invaded, King George of Greece was rushed across the island and down the Samariá Gorge to be evacuated, and it was from Hóra Sfakíon that the bulk of the Allied forces were evacuated (see p.366). Throughout the war, the mountain heights remained the realm of the resistance, and in the late 1960s two ex-civil war guerrillas were found still hiding out here, twenty years on.

Nowadays all of this seems romantically distant. There are frequent **buses** to Hóra Sfakíon and Omalós and a constant stream of people trekking between the two, but you don't have to get far off this path to realize how the reputation grew, and why it still holds such sway. The website of the official Sfakiá survey, Ⓦhttp://sphakia.classics.ox.ac.uk, has more information (monuments, natural features, human geography etc) on Sfakiá.

Omalós and the heart of the mountains

The little plateau around **Omalós** lies pretty much at the heart of the Lefká Óri, surrounded by the highest peaks of the range. Between several hundred and a couple of thousand people head up here daily to join the stampede down the **Samariá Gorge**, but only a handful stop to see anything on the way, and very few indeed take any of the more adventurous routes into the mountains. The gorge route is described in detail on the following pages, and while mountaineering doesn't really fall within the scope of this book, a few starter suggestions are also included. Bear in mind that this is a genuinely wild mountain zone – venture nowhere alone or without adequate equipment. Hikers here have suffered for years from the lack of accurate **maps** and a new 1:25,000 series for the Lefká Óri by mapmakers Anavasi (Ⓦwww.mountains.gr) with GPS waypointing is a welcome aid to exploring this zone.

From Haniá to Omalós

The road up to Omalós turns inland from Haniá's western outskirts, heading at first across a rich but rather dull countryside of orange groves and vineyards interrupted by large modern villages. Shortly before Alikianós (see p.395), the big white building bristling with TV aerials is a prison with a fairly open regime (its inmates work in the fields). This is the building after which the Battle of Crete's "Prison Valley" was named, and at the Alikianós turn-off there's a large **memorial** to local members of the wartime resistance.

Soon after Fournés (see p.334) you begin to climb in earnest to the Lefká Óri through a series of sweeping great loops with increasingly alarming drops. **Lákki**, the only village of any size you pass, has stupendous views from its leafy churchyard, to the rear of a small *platía*. A bracingly exposed place looking back down over the plain in one direction and over the valley of the River Vrísi in the other, it makes an ideal base for walking in the surrounding hills, especially in spring when

The geology of the Lefká Óri

The **Lefká Óri** take their name from the pale-coloured **limestone** of which they are formed. These rocks were laid down between 150 million and forty million years ago, when the region which is now Greece and the Aegean Sea featured a different pattern of land and water, dominated by a large landmass called Apulia.

Material eroded from Apulia was transported southwards and deposited in the sea as a series of limestones which are now seen over much of western Crete: they are known as the **Plattenkalk** or Ida limestones. The nature of the limestone varied according to the distance from the Apulian coast: those deposited close to the coast were coarse and contained quite large pebbles, while those further away were much finer and often arranged in thin layers alternating with a flint-like rock called chert.

To understand how these limestones were formed into the mountains seen today it is necessary to understand something of the theory of "**plate tectonics**". This states that the earth's crust is composed of a number of large, very slowly moving plates, which are added to at "mid-ocean ridges" and destroyed again in ocean trenches at "subduction zones". About 35 million years ago the plate containing Africa began to move northwards relative to the plate containing Europe, forcing the Plattenkalk limestones up, and eventually causing slices of the Apulian rocks from the north to be pushed over them. This buried and deformed the Plattenkalk limestones – the results of which can now be clearly seen in the walls of the Samariá Gorge, where bands of light limestone and dark chert are intensely folded.

Eventually the movement of African plate caused some of the old sea floor to the south to be pushed under all these rocks and initiated a "subduction zone" running along the southern margin of Crete; further movement has since been taken up by subduction of the sea floor. This process has caused continued slow uplift of Crete, particularly in the south close to the subduction zone. As the Lefká Óri have been pushed up in this manner the slices of Apulian rocks on top of them have been eroded away, although old Apulian rocks can still be seen to the north of the mountains where the uplift has been less pronounced.

As the mountains move upwards only very slowly, streams flowing from the centre of Crete have been able to follow their original courses and cut through the mountains, causing the spectacular gorges now seen. This process has been going on for about the last 25 million years and is still continuing – hence gorges such as that at Samariá are getting deeper as the White Mountains continue to rise at the rate of about two metres every thousand years.

wildflowers abound. There are en-suite **rooms** (some air conditioned) with fine views to be had at *Rooms Nikolas* (☎ 28210 67232; ②) near the main square, above a **taverna** serving magnificent food (good breakfasts too), catering heartily for appetites generated by mountain air and whetted with the prospect of strenuous activity. *Kri-Kri*, almost opposite and covered with an avalanche of scarlet bougainvillea in summer, is another taverna. If you encounter honey being sold around the village snap it up: it's made by local producers and is delicious.

Leaving Lákki the road climbs on, past another memorial at the spot where Kapetan Vasilios (Sergeant Major Dan Perkins) and a Cretan colleague were ambushed (a story recounted in *The Cretan Runner* – see p.459), to a **pass** at a little over 1200m, before dropping suddenly to the flat expanse of the **Omalós plain**. If you've caught the dawn bus up from Haniá, it's only now that there's enough light properly to take in the eerily deserted, enclosed little world – and to acknowledge your gratitude at being spared the details of your bus's flirtations with the void at every curve of the ascent. At over 1000m the Omalós plateau is cold, its vegetation stunted, and the enclosing ring of stone peaks is clearly visible all around.

Omalós

There's just one small village up here, **Omalós** itself, sited right at the heart of the plateau. The place is largely unaffected by the daily dawn procession in summer when up to fifty buses pass through (usually without stopping, to the local traders' annoyance) transporting walkers from all over the island to the Samariá Gorge further south. Once the hordes have gone it settles back into the tranquil rustic settlement it remains for most of the year. Walk out into the plain in almost any direction and within five minutes you'll have left all traces of modern life behind, with only the jingling of the occasional goat's bell or the deliberate piling of stones to remind you of human presence.

As is so often the case in Crete, you can't help but think that were this in northern Europe it would be a magnet for **walkers** and naturalists, for the paths into the hills surrounding the plateau (a branch of the E4 Pan-European footpath crosses the southern edge of the village) are strewn with wildflowers in season, birdlife is profuse year round and temperatures even in high summer are refreshingly cool. But you'll usually find that most of the excellent, good-value accommodation here is empty throughout the season (the competition means prices are always low and near identical wherever you ask) and there seems to be little interest in publicizing such a wonderful location. As a further enticement to spend the night, there are fabulous starry skies to be enjoyed up here.

A couple of newish **hotels** look very out of place alongside the chapel and few crude stone houses of the original settlement. The *Hotel Exari* (Ⓣ28210 67180; ②) is the biggest and most obvious of them – with comfortable, modern en-suite rooms with TV. Almost opposite, the *Hotel Neos Omalos* (Ⓣ28210 67269, Ⓦwww.neos-omalos.gr; ②) is perhaps the best of the bunch and has pleasant balcony rooms with bath, TV and central heating. The neighbouring *Hotel Gingilos* (Ⓣ28210 67181; ①) offers modern en-suite rooms with balcony view and TV above a taverna and is run in eccentric style by an entertaining farming family. All three places will usually drive you the 5km to the top of the gorge the following morning if you're staying with them, but make sure to confirm this on arrival. Another friendly place for en-suite rooms with bath, TV and fine balcony views is *To Elleniko* (Ⓣ & Ⓕ28210 67169; ①), just beyond the village some 200m down the road from the others. Its position beyond the village lights makes it great spot for star-gazing. Note that all the places listed here are fully open during the April-to-October season; outside of this period they open weekends only. For **eating** and **drinking**, each of the accommodation places has its own bar and taverna serving up hearty mountain fare, though not all may be open at quiet times – the kitchen of the *Neos Omalos* does tasty *souvláki* and is usually the busiest.

Scattered about the plain are other settlements, but none has the aura of permanent habitation: in winter everything is deep in snow and deserted. In spring the land is marshy and waterlogged – almost becoming a lake if there's a sudden melt. Only in summer do people live here full-time, moving up from Lákki and other villages on the lower slopes round about (Ayía Iríni, Zóurva, Prasés) to pasture sheep and goats or to cultivate, on a small scale, cereals and potatoes.

With your own transport, if you are not planning to walk the gorge, there's a spectacular surfaced road which cuts west through the mountains to link up with the Soúyia road just north of Dimitrianá and Ayía Iríni (see p.396). This is also a possible route to Paleohóra (see p.386).

Scaling the peaks

Perched high over the Samariá Gorge at 1680m, the EOS (Greek Mountain Club) Kallergi Hut (see box) acts as the base for climbing into the peaks, and the staff here are probably the best source of information on doing so. There's also a recently published book on trekking in the White Mountains by Loraine Wilson (see "Books" p.463).

For adventurous walkers, there's a two-day hike (partly along the E4 Pan-European footpath; see also Kallergi Hut box, below) from here through the heart of the range to Anópoli and Hóra Sfakíon. This would take you right past **Páhnes**, the highest summit in the west and, at 2453m, just 3m short of Psilorítis for the title of loftiest in Crete: Haniot mountaineers regularly add stones to the cairn on the peak in an attempt to catch up. With less commitment you could follow the beginning of this trail for two or three hours for some scintillating views down into the gorge and across the seas to the south and west.

You'll probably impress others more, though, if you tackle the climb to the peak of **Mount Gíngilos** (2080m), beginning from the top of the Samariá Gorge. Its north face, the one everyone sees, is a near-vertical slope of solid rock; round the back though, you can reach the summit with only a little scrambling. It's hard work and you need confidence with heights, especially if it's windy, but no special mountaineering skills are necessary. A large yellow sign points the way from the

The Kallergi Hut

If you are staying on the Omalos plateau for a couple of days a hike to the **Kallergi Hut** (May–Oct; occasional winter opening at weekends for determined skiers; Ⓣ28210 33199 to eat here, Ⓣ6936657954 for a bed; €12 per person) is a bracing introduction to the high mountains. It's a fairly easy (if unrelenting) ascent for 5km from the Omalos plain and once you're there makes an excellent base for many other mountain treks. To get to the hut from Omalós you can also drive (on a rough dirt road which is better tackled with a 4x4 vehicle) along the same route. Follow the road towards the gorge entrance for about thirty minutes, then turn left onto the dirt track signed to the hut, a further hour's climb; alternatively, from the top of the Samariá Gorge a signed path leads up in about ninety minutes. From Kallergi you can peer down into the gorge, which looks exceptionally impressive from the isolation of the bare stone peaks up here, a slash of rich green in an otherwise remorseless landscape of grey and brown. On clearer days both the Libyan and Aegean seas can also be seen from the hut, while the nights are also spectacular with the whole dome of the starry heavens arranged above your head.

There's usually no problem finding a bed at the refuge (although it's advisable to ring ahead) and the hut is comfortably equipped with wood-burning stoves and space for fifty persons sleeping in cosy two- and four-bed dormitories. On the rare occasions when the hut is full, sleeping out is an option, but even in high summer the nights can be bitterly cold at this altitude. There's also an excellent **taverna** and the refuge is supervised by its friendly and helpful Austrian guardian and mountaineer, Josef Schemberger. He spends each summer here (and each winter running businesses in Asia) and is an expert on the Lefká Óri. He will answer any queries and does not mind if you contact him on his Austrian number (Ⓣ00 43 6766245345) when he is away from the hut. He can advise on a number of **hikes** from Kallergi including the five-hour circular waymarked route to Mount Psarí (1673m), the twelve-hour hike to Anópoli via Mount Páhnes with an overnight stop at a refuge en route, plus a day-hike from the refuge to the peak of **Melindaoú** (2133m; 16km/7hr walk) on well-marked paths off the E4.

back of the *Tourist Lodge* (see p.350) at the top of the gorge and the path, though not marked with the usual paint splashes, should be easy enough to follow for the two and a half hours to the top. At first you track around to the west, climbing above the plain, before cutting south, downhill slightly, towards the back of the mountain. Here, almost exactly halfway, amid bizarre rock formations which include an arch across the path, there's a spring of ice-cold water (drinkable). Beyond, you begin to climb in earnest for the final thirty minutes. The ascent is signalled with red paint – stick to the path as there are hidden hazards and even the official route needs hands as well as feet. The rewards are an all-round panorama from the summit and, with luck, the chance to spot some of the rarer animal life which crowds have driven from the gorge itself.

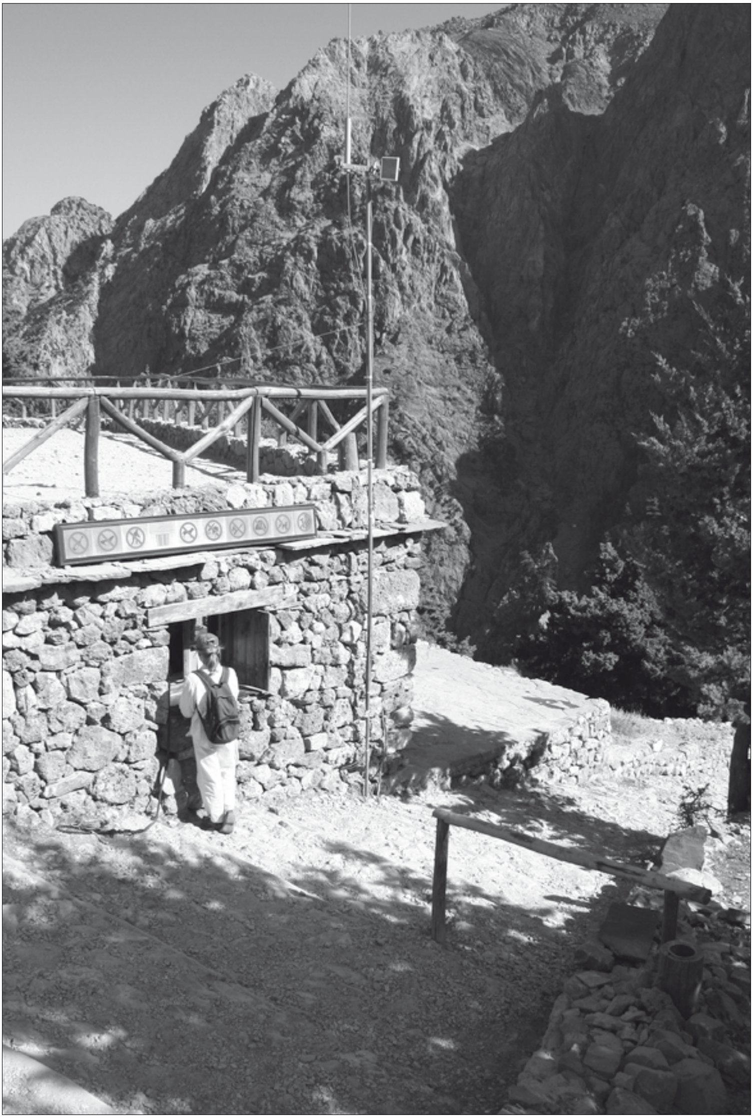
The Samariá Gorge

The one trip that every visitor – even those eminently unsuited to it – feels compelled to make is the hike down the **Samariá Gorge** (*Farángi Samariás*) which, at 16km in length, is claimed to be the **longest in Europe**. Protected by a national park since 1962, this natural wonder was formed by a river flowing between Mount Volakiás to the west and the towering bulk of the heart of the Lefká Óri to the east. In its descent from the plateau the stream has, over time, sliced a steep, cavernous ravine between the two. In summer the violent winter torrent reduces to a meek trickle, and this is when the multitudes descend. If you're expecting a wilderness experience, an opportunity to commune peacefully with nature, think again; Friday and Saturday are the days attracting fewest visitors. On the other hand, this is not a Sunday afternoon stroll to be lightly undertaken; especially in spring when the river is roaring, or on a hot midsummer day, it can be a thoroughly gruelling test of fitness and stamina. The mules and helicopter standing by to rescue the injured are not mere show: anyone who regularly leads tours through the gorge has a stack of horror stories to regale you with – broken legs and heart attacks feature most frequently. To undertake the walk you need to be reasonably fit and/or used to lengthy walks, and you should have comfortable, sturdy shoes that will stand up to hot, sharp rocks.

Gorge practicalities

Conditions permitting, the gorge is **open** between the hours of 6am and sunset, from May 1 to October 31 inclusive; however, the first three weeks after opening and the final two weeks before closure will entirely depend on weather conditions, and you're advised to ring ahead to save a wasted journey. **Admission** to the national park costs €5 (under-15s free): if you enter after 3pm you're only allowed into the first couple of kilometres from each end. During winter the hike is dangerous and often impossible, and even early and late in the season flash floods are a real possibility and not to be taken lightly; in 1993 a number of walkers perished when they were washed out to sea. If in doubt, the Haniá Forest Service has a **gorge information** number (☎28210 67140) and the gorge office (☎28210 67179) at the entrance will also provide advice. Outside the official season, and at the discretion of the wardens, you may be allowed through if the weather is good, but there will be very little transport.

There are a whole series of national park rules (posted at the entrance), but the most important are **no camping**, no fires (or smoking outside the designated areas), no alcohol, no hunting and no interfering with the wildlife or collecting plants. There are wardens who patrol to ensure these are obeyed, that no one wan-



△ Samariá Gorge

ders too far from the main path (another breach of regulations unless you have a permit obtained in advance from the Haniá Forest Service) and that no stragglers are overtaken by nightfall.

As for **supplies** for the walk, you want to carry the minimum possible. On a day-trip you needn't necessarily carry anything, though a water bottle and something to munch on the way are definitely worthwhile (there are springs at regular intervals and ice-cold water in the stream, but for long periods you'll find neither

Transport to and from the gorge

The vast majority of people who walk through the gorge do so as part of a **day-trip**: a very early bus to the top, walk down by early afternoon, boat from Ayía Rouméli to Hóra Sfakíon and bus from there back home. Most go with one of the **guided tours** offered by every travel agent on the island – certainly if you're staying in a hotel anywhere in the east of Crete this is much the simplest method, and probably the only way of doing it in a single day. Most tours will include all bus and ferry connections, but not food or the entrance fee to the park itself. (If you're planning to stay on the south coast, the tour bus can save you the effort of carrying your bags; simply stow them underneath and retrieve them in Hóra Sfakíon. Do let them know your plan, though, both to guard against an unexpected switch of bus and to prevent search parties being sent out.) If, however, you are staying in Haniá, or marginally less straightforwardly in Iráklion, Réthimnon, Soúyia or Paleohóra, you can save money and avoid having to walk in a large group by taking the **public bus**, which runs a daily service during the periods when the gorge is open.

From Haniá there are four departures a day, at 6.15am, 7.30am, 8.30am and 2pm (this latter service changes to 4.30pm outside school term time), arriving at the top about ninety minutes later. You'll normally be sold a return ticket, including the return leg from Hóra Sfakíon (which needn't necessarily be used the same day), so if you don't want this you'll have to make your intentions very clear; the bus station is in total chaos when the first buses leave. There's a lot to be said for taking the **earliest bus**: more of the walk can be completed while it's still relatively cool, there's no need to force your pace, and if you're planning to stop over anywhere at the bottom you've more chance of being among the first to arrive. On the other hand, everyone now does this – there's often a procession of as many as five full buses leaving Haniá before dawn, the bus station is in turmoil, there are queues and confusion when you arrive, and you're unlikely to escape from crowds the whole way down. It may be hotter, but it's also quieter if you set out later. The first buses of the day **from Iráklion** (5.30am) **and Réthimnon** (6.15am and 7am) to Haniá continue direct to Omalós, while there are also services from **Paleohóra** (6am) and **Soúyia** (7am); the last two meet in Ayía Iríni from where one continues to the gorge and the other direct to Haniá, so you may have to change.

From the bottom of the gorge, **boats** leave Ayía Rouméli for Hóra Sfakíon, calling in at Loutró en route, at 9am (June–Sept only) 3.45pm and 6pm throughout the season; there's a reduced service in the second half of October, and hardly any boats from November to April when the gorge is closed. The trip takes around an hour (30 mins to Loutró). Boats also head west from Ayía Rouméli for Soúyia (45min) and Paleohóra (1hr 30min) daily at 4.45pm between May and September. **Buses** from Hóra Sfakíon back to Haniá leave at 7am, 11am, 5.30pm and 7pm; for Réthimnon there are direct ones at 5.30pm and 7pm (otherwise you change at Vrísses); for Plakiás summer only at 11am and 6pm. It's also possible to get back to Haniá via Soúyia (bus at 5.45pm) or Paleohóra (3.30pm & 7pm), though this is a longer journey. There should always be enough capacity on the boats, and the buses wait for the boats to arrive.

If you want to do the gorge using **your own transport**, or while staying in Omalós, it's possible to walk down, take the boat to Soúyia, and then get a taxi back up to Omalós or the gorge parking area from there – Soúyia taxis generally charge about €30 for this.

– especially over the last, hottest hour) as is some means of carrying clothes you discard en route (7am at the top feels close to freezing; 1pm at the bottom may hover around 38°C/100°F). If you plan to stay a day or two at the bottom you'd do better to leave your pack at Haniá's bus station or elsewhere for collection later, taking only what's essential. For **food**, there's a café near the gorge entrance and an official *Tourist Lodge* (with substantial meals and a fine terrace view) on the heights above this, plus stalls for hot drinks, bottled water and snacks, while Ayía Rouméli is more than equipped to feed everyone arriving at the bottom.

Most walkers head **down** (rather than up) the gorge, and it would be a daunting start were it not for the well-worn trail leading clearly down below you, the buses and cars jostling for space to park, and the dozens of people hanging around ready to set off. This is a fine place for a spot of contemplation before heading down, allowing the crowds to disperse if you've arrived with a mob. There are maps showing the path and facilities en route, others with the vegetation zones marked, and lists of park regulations.

The nearby **Lefká Óri Information Centre** (May–Oct daily 8am–8pm; €1) is a great introduction to the wildlife, geology, culture and history of the gorge. One imaginative feature is a miniature gorge walk which takes you down a model of the gorge illustrating the flora and fauna to be seen at the various altitudes on the descent to the sea. Good as it is, though, the centre opens long after most of its potential visitors have passed by its gates in the early dawn, with more pressing things on their minds.

The gorge hike itself is some **18km long** (the final two kilometres to reach the sea from the mouth of the gorge) and the **walk** down takes between four and seven hours, depending on your level of fitness and how often you stop to admire the scenery, bathe your feet and take refreshment. Be wary of the kilometre markers – these mark only distances within the park, not the full extent of the walk. At the park entrance, you'll be given a date-stamped ticket in return for your entrance fee, which should be kept and handed in at the gate by which you leave; this is partly to make sure no one tries camping in the park, partly to check that nobody is lost inside.

Accommodation

If you want to make the gorge part of a longer excursion, there are several **accommodation** options. The nearest bed you can get to the entrance is now at one of the places in Omalós (see p.345) or in the Kallergi Hut (p.346). Alternatively you could simply sleep out: there are usually quite a few people trying to find a flat space for their sleeping bags around the entrance. This has few real advantages however; you'd have to be up very early to steal a march on the first arrivals from Haniá (for much of the year this would mean setting off before daylight) and from Omalós you face an extra five-kilometre walk to reach the top of the trail (or the early buses will stop and pick you up on their way through). Nonetheless, it does make quite a change to stay up here and freeze for a night, and of course it gives you the opportunity to explore more than just the gorge. The *Tourist Lodge* at the top no longer has rooms, though their **taverna** is a great place for a meal, with spectacular mountain views from its terrace.

Staying on the **south coast** for a night or more after your exertions makes more sense: there are rooms at Ayía Rouméli (see p.354), Loutró (p.355) and Hóra Sfakíon (p.366) or westwards in Soúyia (p.398) and Paleohóra (p.386).

The walk

The gorge begins, with startling suddenness, on the far side of the plateau. After the dull tranquillity of the plain you are faced with this great cleft opening beneath your feet and, across it – close enough to bounce stones off, it seems – the gaunt limestone face of Mount Gíngilos. The descent starts on the **Xilóskalon** ("wooden stairway"), a stepped path cut from the rock and augmented by log stairs and wooden handrails, which zigzags rapidly down to the base of the gorge, plunging 350m in the first 2km or so of the walk. Near the bottom the chapel of Áyios Nikólaos stands on a little terrace of coniferous trees where there are benches from which to enjoy the view, and fresh water. Beyond, the path begins gradually to level out, following the stream bed amid softer vegetation which reflects the milder climate down here. In late spring it's magnificent, but at any time of year there should be wildflowers and rare plants (no picking allowed), including the endangered large white peony, *Paeonia clusii*. The stream itself is less reliable: there are places where you can be sure of icy fresh water and pools to bathe sore feet all year round (particularly in the middle sections), but what starts in spring as a fierce, even dangerous torrent has dwindled by autumn to a trickle between hot, dry boulders, disappearing beneath the surface for long stretches.

The abandoned village of **Samariá** lies a little under midway through the walk, shortly before the 7km marker. One of the buildings here has been converted to house the wardens' office, another has been pressed into (inadequate) service as a public toilet, but for the most part the remains of the village are quietly crumbling away. Its inhabitants, until they were relocated to make way for the park in 1962, were predominantly members of the Viglis family, who claimed direct descent from one of the twelve aristocratic clans implanted from Byzantium. Certainly this settlement, as isolated as any in Crete and cut off by floodwater for much of the year, is a very ancient one – the church of **Óssia María**, from which both gorge and village take their name, was founded in the early fourteenth century.

After Samariá the path is more level, the walls of the gorge begin to close in and the path is often forced to cross from one side of the stream to the other, on **stepping stones** which at times may be submerged and slippery. Beside you, the contorted striations of the cliffs are increasingly spectacular, but the highlight comes shortly after the Christós resting point with the **Sidherespórtes** (Iron Gates) where two rock walls rise sheer to within a whisker of a thousand feet: standing at the bottom, one can almost touch both at once. For this short stretch, there's a wooden walkway raised above the stream, whose swirling waters fill the whole of the narrow passage. Almost as suddenly as you entered this mighty crack in the mountain you leave it again, the valley broadens, its sides fall away, and you're in a parched wilderness of rubble deposited here by the spring thaw.

Before long – 8km beyond Samariá – you reach the fringes of Ayía Rouméli, where there's a gate by which you leave the park and a couple of stalls selling cool drinks at crippling prices. Frustratingly, however, this is not the end of the walk: old Ayía Rouméli has been all but deserted in favour of the new beachside community, a further excruciatingly hot, dull twenty minutes away. Arriving finally in **Ayía Rouméli** proper (see p.352), you face the agonizing choice between plunging into the sea or diving into one of the tavernas for an iced drink – though in the event it takes a strong will to walk past the rows of enticingly dew-dropped cans of chilled fruit juice and ice-cold beers set out to divert you from your course to the water. Once your senses adjust, Ayía Rouméli is a pretty unattractive place – but that drink, and the first plunge in the sea, are likely to live in the memory as the most refreshing ever.

Ascending the gorge

Starting from the bottom, the hike **up the gorge** to **Omalós** is not as hard as some imagine, though it will take rather longer – six to seven hours at a reasonable, steady pace. Few people do it all the way, which means that at the top you may well find the gorge almost empty; on the way up, however, you'll have had to pass the hordes charging down. You could also walk a short way up and come back – an outing offered as a day-trip known as "Samariá the Lazy Way". This will

Flora and fauna in the gorge

Gorge **wildlife** means most famously the *kri-kri* (variously the *agrimi*, *Capra aegagrus*, the Cretan wild goat or ibex), for whose protection the park was primarily created. You are most unlikely to see one of these large, nimble animals with their long backswept horns, though you may well see ordinary mountain goats defying death on the cliff faces. More likely candidates for viewing are the local birds and reptiles. Almost four hundred varieties of **birds** are claimed to have been seen here, including owls, eagles, falcons and vultures; bird-watchers after a coup should look out for the endangered lammergeier (or bearded vulture). On the ground lizards abound, there's also the odd snake and you may just spot the beech marten, spiny mouse and weasel, species of which are unique to Crete.

The multifarious **trees** – Cretan maple, pine and cypress – are remnants of ancient forests and provide the backdrop to an often dazzling array of **wildflowers**, perhaps the most rewarding finds when in season; the purple *Tulipa saxatilis* and rock plants such as aubretias, saxifrages and anemones stand out, and there are wild irises and orchids here too. **Herbs** are also to be seen in abundance; besides the intoxicatingly aromatic thyme and rosemary and common sage and oregano, there are half a dozen species that exist exclusively in the gorge and nowhere else. Also to be found here – and usually growing in the most inaccessible places – is **Cretan dittany**, a celebrated medicinal herb referred to by Aristotle and Hippocrates and taken by women in ancient times as a method of abortion; indeed modern science has shown the ancients to have been correct in believing that the herb acted as an abortifacient when taken in large quantities in early pregnancy.

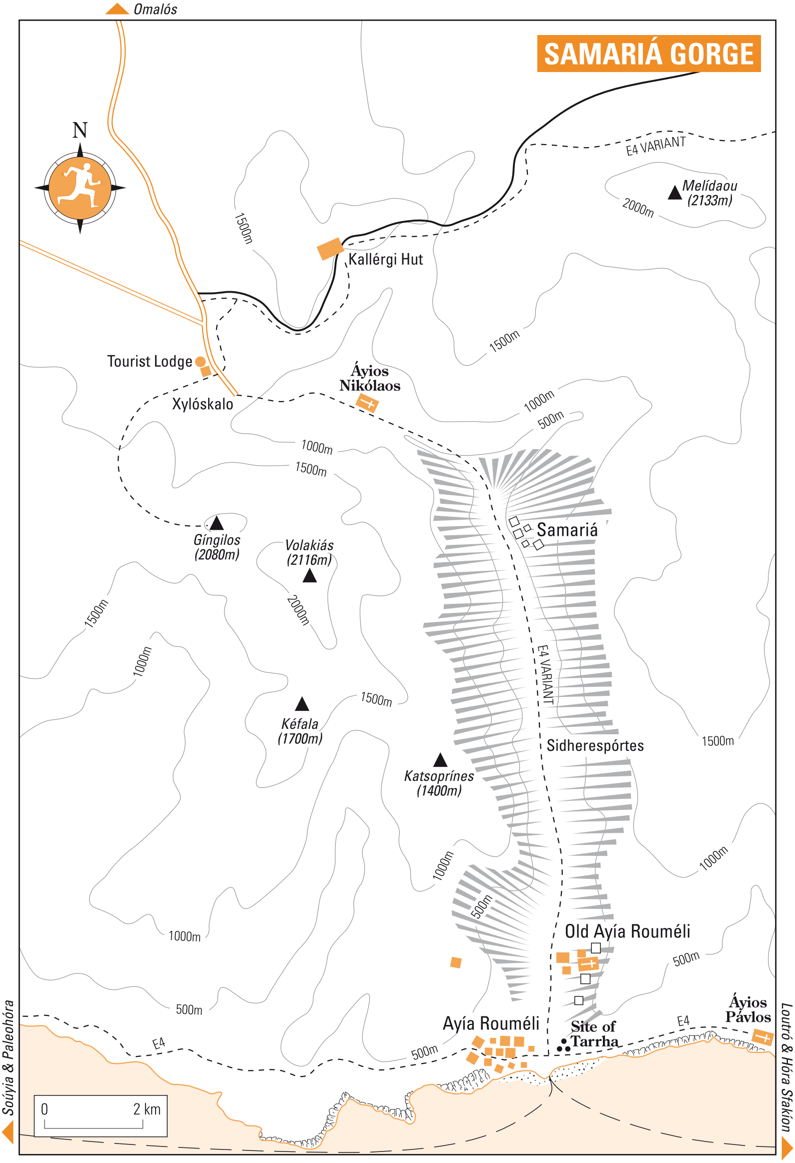
Two **books** on the gorge can prove useful in identifying most of the flora and fauna and are portable enough to take along. *The Samaria Gorge Yesterday and Today* (Toubis, Athens) documents the history of the gorge from the Romans to World War II, and includes an illustrated guide to the flora and fauna along its length, whilst *The Gorge of Samaria and Its Plants* by Albertis Atonis (Albertis, Iráklion) provides a step-by-step description of the flora. Both titles are widely available from bookshops in Haniá, Réthimnon or Iráklion or can be ordered in advance.

show you the Iron Gates, the most spectacular individual section, but it means a lot of walking in the dullest parts down by the coast and none of the almost alpine scenes nearer the top.

Ayía Rouméli

Once you've recovered from the gorge walk, drunk and eaten your fill, plunged into the sea and out again (a couple of the tavernas have showers which they'll let you use if you eat there), lain on the pebbles for a while and rested, **Ayía Rouméli**'s attractions soon begin to pall. It's a singularly unattractive example of over-rapid development, with a rash of concrete tavernas and rooms for rent spreading over a large shingly beach. By local standards it's expensive too, although given the difficulties of transport this is perhaps not altogether surprising. The village is, however, attempting to be environmentally conscious: the pile of huge concrete tank traps behind the beach shields a solar energy plant; at night, or other times when this system can't cope, a diesel generator cuts in.

Finding anything much to do apart from laze on the beach takes some ingenuity. Although there was an ancient settlement here – **Tarra**, inhabited probably from the fifth century BC through to the fifth AD – and more or less constant later habitation, very little remains to be seen. The ruined **Turkish fort**, under which you pass as you emerge from the gorge onto the beach, doesn't really justify the scramble up to see



SAMARIÁ GORGE

Omalós
N
E4 VARIANT
Melídaou (2133m)
2000m
1500m
Kallérgi Hut
1500m
Tourist Lodge
Xylóskalo
Áyios Nikólaos
1000m
500m
1000m
1500m
Samariá
Gíngilos (2080m)
Volakiás (2116m)
2000m
1500m
1000m
E4 VARIANT
1500m
Kéfala (1700m)
Sidherespórtes
1500m
Katsoprínes (1400m)
1000m
500m
1000m
1000m
Old Ayía Rouméli
500m
500m
Ayía Rouméli
Site of Tarrha
Áyios Pávlos
E4
500m
E4
Soúyia & Paleohóra
Loutró & Hóra Sfakíon
0
2 km

it. Tarra straddled the stream where it ran into the sea, just to the east of the present village – the only obvious remains are the foundations of an early Christian basilica by the present **church of Panayía**, around which you may also spot a few tiny fragments of mosaic. This, supposedly, was the site of a much earlier temple of Apollo.

Practicalities

Ayía Rouméli does have its good points – mainly the sheer number of places to eat and to stay – and at night it's very peaceful. Should you be tempted **to stay**, try the tranquil *Livikon* (☎28250 91363; ②) at the rear of the village, or the sea-view rooms attached to tavernas *Tara* (☎28250 91231; ②) or *Zorba's* (no phone; ②); you can also book ahead at the *Hotel Agia Roumeli* (☎28250 91240; ③), with a few more comforts and good balcony views. Just to the east of the village (near the solar plant) is a clump of trees among which a few people are usually **camped**, and on the beach in this direction are some caves, also sometimes used to sleep out in.

The kiosk which sells **boat tickets** is plainly marked down by the beach: if you're catching the bus back to Haniá or elsewhere from Hóra Sfakíon, you could get a ticket for the last connecting boat when you emerge from the gorge, and spend the afternoon on the beach. If you plan to stay elsewhere on this coast, take the first boat available for the best chance of finding a room at your destination.

Loutró and south-coast walks

Of all the south-coast villages, **LOUTRÓ** perhaps best sums up what this coast ought to be all about. It's an incredibly soporific place, where there's absolutely nothing to do but eat, drink and laze – and where you fast lose any desire to do anything else. The big excitements of the day are the occasional arrivals and departures of the ferries. The days start bright and are soon lost in an overpowering heat shimmer; evening comes cool and darkness falls fast – by 10pm the place is virtually asleep. All this despite the fact that it has been almost entirely taken over by tourists. Little happens all summer long to interrupt this easygoing idyll, but if you're here for the great **feast of the Panayía** on August 15 the small church is the place to head for. From the early dawn, the formidable local priest conducts the service, which lasts until after midday. The small churchyard then fills up with all those who had intended to come earlier – and each of whom receives a disapproving glare from the *papás* – as biblical quantities of *arní* (roast lamb), *psomí* and *krasí* are doled out and everyone enjoys a great feast.

The short waterfront arching around a beautiful little bay consists of a row of perhaps six **tavernas** and a similar number of **rooms** places plus one small **hotel**; the mountains rise immediately behind the waterfront. There's no road in – everyone here has either come on the boat or walked, which helps to keep things very low-key, prices reasonable, big groups rare and the people genuinely friendly. Although the transparent blue water here is always inviting, perhaps Loutró's main drawback is its lack of a real **beach**. There's a small stretch of pebbles in front of the eastern half of the sea-front, with large signs asking bathers to remain respectable. Try lying topless here and you'll be told none too politely to cover up; those who persist risk being catcalled by the village children. But the sheltered bay is otherwise ideal for **swimming**, clear and warm, and people bask nude on the rocks around the point, far enough out to avoid offence. The good news is that there are other beaches in walking distance (see p.356), with small boats or rented canoes ferrying visitors to the best, at **Sweetwater** to the east and **Mármara** to the west.

Practicalities

You can **change money** and buy supplies at the village's two minimarkets, and a second store a little further on (immediately before the beach) has a good selection of secondhand books and also changes money. There are **cardphones** behind the beach, and **canoes** can be rented from the *períptero* (kiosk) behind the beach for expeditions to the nearby coves and beaches. For the same purpose **dinghies** with outboard motor can be hired from *Café Loutró* (near the *Blue House*) for €12 per hour plus fuel. Any of the tavernas (try the *Blue House*) can arrange a taxi-boat to Hóra Sfakíon (about €30) and elsewhere. There's a daily **boat** at 11am to the **Sweetwater and Mármara beaches** returning at 4.30pm from each (Mármara from the jetty, Sweetwater from the eastern end of the strand). **Boat tickets** are sold from a kiosk behind the ferry dock at the extreme western end of the sea front, but they only go on sale a few minutes before departure; try to have the right change. **Internet** access is available at the *Daskalogiannis Hotel* (see below).

Accommodation

Rooms in Loutró seem uniformly basic and comfortable, though to be sure of finding one you should arrive as early as possible – an increasing number seem to be pre-booked through enterprising travel agencies and foreign holiday firms. Try for one with a balcony (the *Porto Loutro* and *Blue House* offer top-floor rooms with huge roof terraces); the quietest places are generally the furthest round to the east, but nowhere is exactly loud or stays open late. If you can't find anywhere at all to stay, you could hike or take a boat over to Fínix, Líkkos or Mármara (see p.356–58): most proprietors at these places will even send a boat to collect you. You could also consider **camping** out on Sweetwater Beach (p.356), but you should be aware that freelance campers are not very popular in and around the village after years of problems.

Blue House ⓣ28250 91127, ⓦwww.delftmarkt.nl/thebluehouse. One of the original places here, and still one of the friendliest and best. Good-value a/c en-suite rooms with fridge and a wonderful (more expensive) top-floor extension. ②–③

Daskalogiannis Hotel ⓣ28250 91514, ⓦwww.loutro.com. Newish hotel above the ferry dock where sea-view balcony rooms come with a/c, fridge and TV. ⑤ with breakfast.

Ilios ⓣ28250 91160. Pleasant rooms (some pricier ones with a/c and fridge) above a good taverna. ②–③

Keramos ⓣ28250 91356. Quiet, standard rooms (some with sea view) on the east side of the bay. Also rents out canoes. ②–③

Rooms Manousoudaki In the upper village, behind the church ⓣ28250 91348. Simple a/c en-suite rooms with fridge, often with vacancies after sea-front places have gone. ②

Notos ⓣ28250 91501. Just along from the *Porto Loutro*, with sea-view en-suite rooms with fridges and fans. ②

Rooms Patrudakis ⓣ28250 91354. Rooms with bath close to, and similar to, *Manousoudaki*. If there's no one around enquire at the minimarket owned by the same family. ②

Hotel Porto Loutro ⓣ28250 91433, ⓦwww.hotelportoloutro.com. One of the two places with any pretensions at all, right in the middle of the village above the beach. Run by Anglo-Greek proprietors, it's a lovely place whose white cubes fit in surprisingly well with the surroundings; it's not outrageously expensive either, though since the a/c rooms are pretty accurate reproductions of a simple Greek room you may question whether it's worth paying the extra. Includes breakfast. ④

Villas & Apartments Niki Behind the sea front ⓣ28250 91529, ⓦwww.loutro-accommodation.com. En-suite a/c rooms and fully equipped apartments with sea views and an attractive patio garden. Also has an attractive villa (⑧) sleeping up to seven. ④–⑥

Eating and drinking

Because most of its visitors come from northern Europe, Loutró's tavernas tend to be busy earlier on and start to close by 9.30pm. Many of the places here have a better than usual **vegetarian** selection.

Blue House Central sea front. Probably the best restaurant in Loutró, recognizable from its blue-checked tablecloths (although quite a few other places are imitating this feature now); the owner is one of the village's friendliest characters.

Ilios At the eastern end of the seafront. Good fresh fish, caught from their own boat.

Café Bar Maistrali Almost the westernmost building in Loutró (near the ferry jetty), this is where everyone heads in the evening, although they also serve breakfasts. Its cocktails and music may seem a bit slick in this setting, but it's certainly a pleasant way to wind up your day.

Notos Central sea front. Excellent *mezédhes* (try their tasty *fáva or saganáki*) served on a pleasant small terrace.

Sifis At the western end of the sea front, this is another decent place for a variety of fish and meat dishes.

The coast around Loutró: Sweetwater to Mármara

Anyone who spends any time at all in Loutró is eventually taken with the urge to explore – even if it's just climbing up to the ruins on the headland. There are plenty of long, tough treks available (see p.358), but there are also easier walks to nearby beaches. Some of these can also be reached by boat. **Hiking** near Loutró has been facilitated by the publication of *Walks around Loutró* by Keith Linton and Danny Staples detailing ten relatively easy hikes in the hills around the resort – it's on sale at shops in the village.

Sweetwater Beach

East of Loutró, **Sweetwater Beach** lies in the middle of a barren coastline, approximately halfway to Hóra Sfakíon. From the sea, as you pass on one of the coastal boats, it appears as a long, extremely narrow slice of grey between sheer ochre cliffs and a dark, deep sea. Closer up, the beach seems much larger, but there's still a frightening sense of being isolated between unscalable mountains and an endless stretch of water.

The beach takes its name from the small springs, which bubble up beneath the pebbles to provide fresh, cool drinking water. You can dig a hole almost anywhere to find water; there are plenty already made, but you should take care not to pollute the groundwater with soap. For years there was a little enclave of **nudist campers** here, their idyll interrupted only by the occasional intrepid cliff-walker. Over the last couple of years, though, daily boat services have started from both Loutró and Hóra Sfakíon, bringing a lot more people. So far these have not spoilt the place – the beach is easily big enough to absorb everyone – and the campers are still here, for once doing a good job of keeping the place pristine: there are signs up warning against leaving rubbish, and people regularly make an effort to pick up any junk that is left behind.

The long-term residents (including local goats) tend to monopolize the only shade, in the **caves** at the back of the beach, but you can always escape the sun at the small **bar/taverna** which sits on a lump of concrete just off the western end of the beach, reached by a rickety plank. You can get cold drinks and simple meals here and they also rent out sun umbrellas. There are no other facilities beyond the **boats**, which come once in the morning and again in the late afternoon. Walking here is also a possibility, though a very hot and shadeless one: about 45 minutes or so to Loutró, an hour to Hóra Sfakíon (p.366). On a calm day, you could even paddle a canoe over from Loutró. The path runs along behind all the houses in Loutró – to join it from there, climb up behind the beachside kiosk and church.

Fínix

Immediately to the west of Loutró, in the beautiful little bay on the other side of the promontory, stood **ancient Fínikas**, now known as **Fínix** or Phoenix. This was a major town during the Roman and Byzantine periods, and a significant port long after that: it was the harbour at Fínix, a more comfortable place to wait out

△ Fínix cove

the winter storms than Kalí Liménes, which St Paul's ship was hoping to reach when it was swept away. A local story has the saint actually landing here and being beaten up by the locals he tried to convert: given the attitude to Cretans revealed in Paul's epistle to Titus, it is, as Michael Llewellyn Smith points out, "safe to say that if he had landed here they would have beaten him up".

Yet again there is very little to be seen. These days the bay, with its rocky beach, has what has become quite a fashionable **taverna** and **rooms** place, the *Old Phoenix* (☎28250 91257, Ⓦwww.old-phoenix.com; ②–③) – somehow, despite being done up, it seems to remain exceptionally languid, the epitome of a tranquil hideaway with en-suite rooms, some with air conditioning. They also rent out sun umbrellas and loungers as well as **canoes**. It's hard to believe there could ever have been a population of any size here. Up on the headland, though, there's certainly evidence of later occupation, principally in the form of the **Venetian fortification** on the point from where – on clear days – it's possible to glimpse the island of Gávdhos, 50km out to sea. Nearby are traces of a Byzantine basilica and other scattered remains; most curiously, however, there's a building, very much in the form of a Venetian church, sunk entirely below ground level. Its arched roof is intact, the interior entirely full of water. Nowadays it is deliberately flooded and used as a storage cistern, but its original purpose remains a mystery. It could always have been a cistern, of course, but it seems too elaborate for that; an alternative theory suggests it was an underground arsenal attached to the castle.

To **walk** to Fínix by the most direct route, join the path – now part of the E4 Pan-European footpath – that runs behind Loutró, up behind the beachside kiosk and the church. This will lead you straight up, past the castle and directly over the headland, in around fifteen minutes; if you're continuing beyond Fínix, you don't have to go down to the water as a path continues straight past the back of the bay, but it's only marginally shorter. It's also possible to get there by walking out past the last house in Loutró and simply following the rocky coast around. This is a much longer and tougher walk, but it does have the compensation of passing plenty of good rocks to swim from, and extensive remains of old buildings which you can imagine are, and may indeed be, ancient Fínikas. **Boats** to Mármara also regularly call in at Fínix, bringing supplies.

Líkkos

West of Fínix, the path continues to another, much longer bay, **Líkkos**, with three rather poorly patronized ultra-economical **taverna/rooms** places, making it another escapist's paradise – and there's plenty of fresh water too, which there may not be in Loutró. Stepping up from the mooring jetty, ★ *Small Paradise* (☎28250 91125; ①) continues the theme and is the first place you see, run by a friendly Irish-Greek couple; en-suite rooms are available above their taverna (where the *mizithra* sheep's cheese is a speciality) or excellent balcony sea-view rooms in their recent extension next door. Phone them if you want to stay and Michaelis, the boss's brother, will come and pick you up for free from Loutró or Fínix with his boat. Slightly east, *Akrogiali* (☎28250 91446; ①) has similar en-suite rooms with balcony views. Simpler (and even cheaper) rooms are on offer at *Rooms Yeoryios* (☎28250 91457; ①), the last of the three, right in the middle of the beach, with chickens running around out front and a pleasantly eccentric (eponymous) owner. Yeóryios will also come and pick you up from Loutró or Fínix free of charge.

Unfortunately Líkkos is not a very attractive **beach**, with rocks and pebbles, and is awkward to swim from unless you wear shoes. Behind, you can look up and see the village of Livaniană, perched on the eastern flank of the Arádhena Gorge (see p.362).

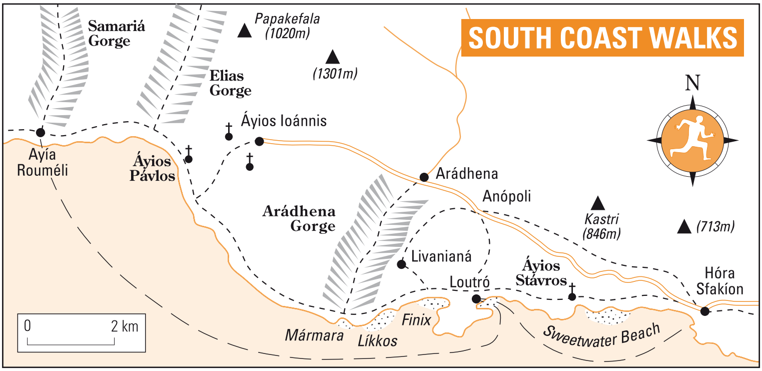
Mármara Beach

The Arádhena Gorge emerges at the sea in the next bay west of Líkkos, **Mármara Beach**, which takes its name from some marble deposits visible near the jetty where you land. This is another fairly small cove, with a sandy beach surrounded by interesting rock formations full of caves and slabs to dive from or sunbathe on. Unfortunately it also sees at least three boats a day from Loutró, which in summer bring more people than can comfortably be accommodated. So although out of season it might be more attractive than Sweetwater, at peak times it is far less so – and fresh water is at a premium here, as the not always pleasant toilet block will attest. A simple **taverna/rooms place** gives the place a focus, as well as providing an outlet for renting sun umbrellas and loungers; tempting cool drinks are available from their generator-run fridge. The proprietors also try to keep the beach free of tourist litter. *Rooms Chrisostomos* (☎28250 91387 or 6942201456; open April–Oct; ②) offers simple en-suite cabins lighted with oil lamps and candles, and the eponymous owner will pick you up with his boat from Loutró for free (providing of course, you intend to stay). He is a good source of information on the many **walking** possibilities in this zone: from Mármara you could walk up the Arádhena Gorge to Livaniană (where there's a good and friendly taverna, the *Livaniana*), about a three-hour hike, or you could do the coastal route to Áyios Pávlos (about 2hr 30min; see p.362) and Ayía Rouméli (one hour further).

Some people do **camp** here, but to do so you have to make a very long hike for supplies, or regularly take the boats to and from Loutró. Walking to Mármara takes a little over an hour in all, and the second half, from the far end of the beach at Líkkos, is hot and exposed, climbing high onto the cliff.

South-coast walks

Loutró lies close to the heart of the network of coastal paths linking Ayía Rouméli in the west to Hóra Sfakíon in the east. In the absence of a road, Loutró is



an important junction for long, often challenging **south-coast walks**. Most real traffic nowadays goes by boat, of course, and the last inland hamlets have finally had a driveable track built to them. But the paths and tracks remain, to give a variety of possible **hikes**, even the easiest of which can be demanding in the heat of high summer. You'll need, at the very least, decent shoes to cope with rough, rocky terrain and a water bottle, which you should fill at every opportunity. You should also have a companion, since some of these paths are pretty isolated, and outside help cannot be relied upon. For a locally available book of walks around Loutró see p.356.

Coastal routes from Loutró

The **coastal path** – now part of the E4 Pan-European footpath – is the most obvious, the most frequently used by tourists and, in terms of not getting lost, the simplest to follow. There's not a great deal to see en route, however, nor is it an easy walk – the path is often frighteningly narrow and uneven as it clings to the cliff face, and in summer it is very, very hot, offering no shelter at all from the sun, so headwear and protection are advised.

Heading east from **Loutró to Hóra Sfakíon** is barely a problem: it's the most heavily travelled part, the whole walk takes less than two hours (8km), and there's a rest stop at Sweetwater Beach halfway. Loutró to Sweetwater is straightforward and fairly well beaten: beyond here the path clambers over a massive rockfall and then follows the cliffs until it eventually emerges on the Hóra Sfakíon–Anópoli road about thirty minutes' walk above Hóra. This is easy to find from the other direction too, the path (to the left) leaving the road at the first hairpin bend.

Heading west, **Loutró to Ayía Rouméli** is an altogether tougher proposition. For a start you can expect to be walking for at least four hours solid, a real sweat in high summer, and for seconds, after the tavernas at Líkkos the only chance of refreshment is at Áyios Pávlos (see below). The path has already been described as far as Mármara beach (see opposite). After Mármara you climb again to track along the exposed cliff face for around an hour before reaching the first sign of civilization, a solitary cottage and a few trees. In about another hour, you'll arrive at the eleventh-century cruciform chapel of **Áyios Pávlos**, yet another site where St Paul is supposed to have landed. Here he allegedly christened locals in a spring close to the church (now only a trickle). The chapel itself is ancient and rather beautiful, set on a ledge above the water, and surrounded by dunes; inside are fresco fragments dated to the thirteenth century. You could cool off in the sea here before setting out on the final hour to Ayía Rouméli, and there is now a **taverna**, *Saint Paul* (June–Sept only), which also rents out tents for nearby camping.

Coming east from Ayía Rouméli this path is well marked, heading east out of the village. Ten to fifteen minutes after Áyios Pávlos it splits, left to climb inland to Áyios Ioánnis and Anópoli, right to continue along the coast to Mármara.

To Anópoli

If you're hiking for its own sake, or for that matter if you want to take the easiest way from Ayía Rouméli to Hóra Sfakíon without necessarily calling at Loutró, then the **inland routes** centring on Anópoli have a great deal to be said for them.

Getting to Anópoli, which is high above the coast more or less directly above Loutró, is not easy unless you have a car. **From Hóra Sfakíon** it's 12km up a very steep, winding road with alarming hairpin bends and few barriers, making meeting a bus or truck coming in the opposite direction a pretty nerve-wracking experience if you happen to be on the outside. You probably wouldn't want to drive this at night, nor would you really want to walk up either, but you might not have much choice, since the lone daily **bus** drives up at 4pm and down again at 6.30am. The walk up **from Loutró** also looks terrifying – you can see the path tracking back and forth across an almost vertical cliff – but is in fact not as bad as it seems: about ninety minutes, climbing steeply most of the way. This is best done very early, before the sun gets too powerful; at the top you're on the fringes of Anópoli – turn left for the centre.

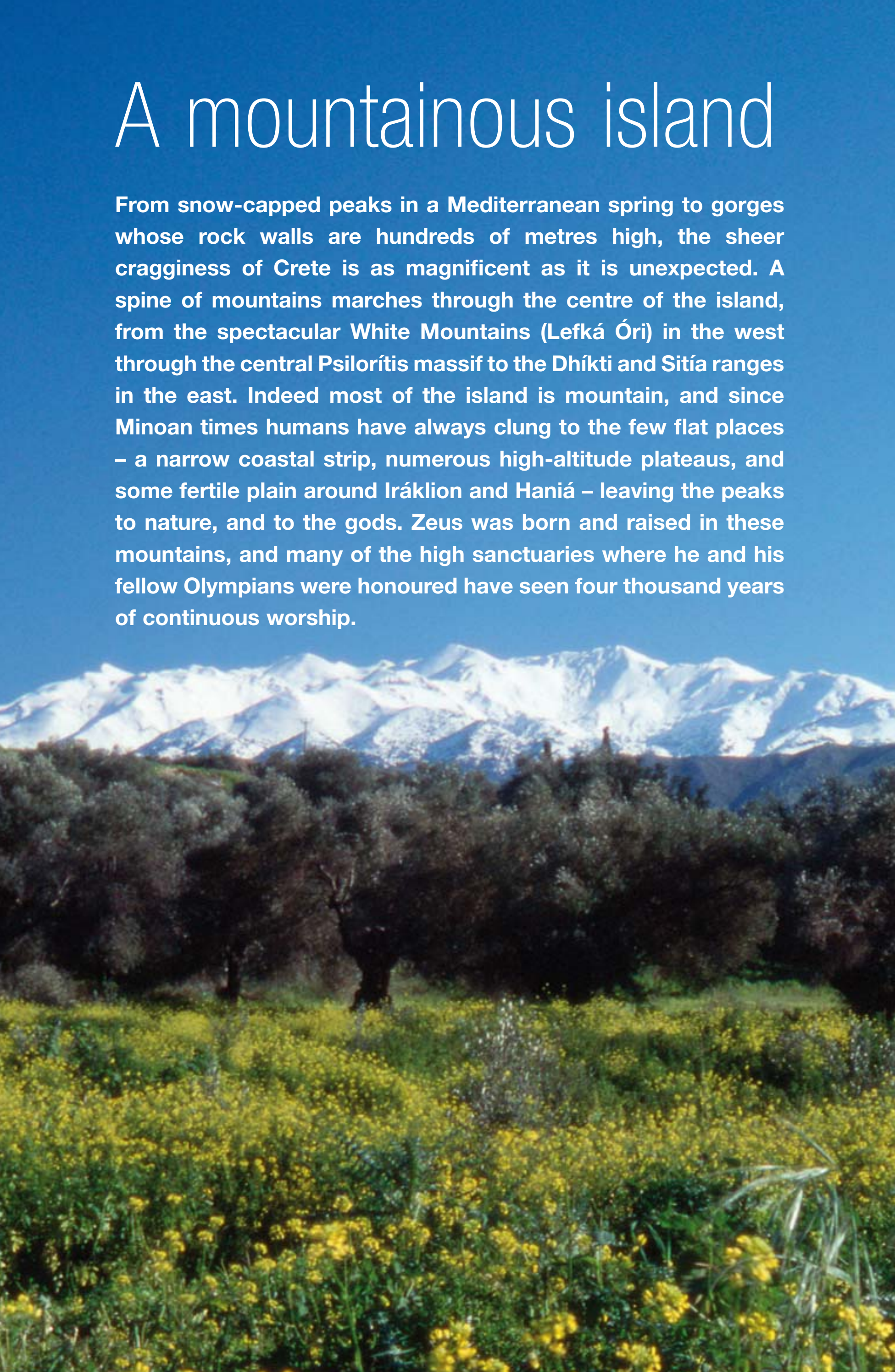
Anópoli itself is a quiet country village, not much used to visitors, dominating a small upland plain with a few rare vestiges of forest. After the climb from the coast the road levels for a good couple of kilometres passing the rooms places mentioned below before reaching the village proper. Another wonderful location to sample the simple delights of rural Crete, the expansive main square features a couple of *kafenía* and a small general store. Outside of holiday periods such as the festival of Panayía on August 15, if you wanted to stay away from all the hustle of the coast you should be able to find somewhere here. The village also makes a good base for an exploration of the Arádhena Gorge (see p.362). There are several **rooms** places along the road as you approach from Hóra Sfakíon; the friendliest is the excellent-value *Panorama* (☎28250 91100; ①) for en-suite rooms where you'll get a warm Sfakiá welcome. The other good place is in the village proper, a couple of kilometres further, where 🏃 *Taverna Platanias* (☎28250 91169; ①) has rooms with bath fronting the statue of Dhaskaloyiánnis (see box below) on the main square; they also have an apartment (②) to let for a two-night minimum stay with full kitchen and TV. The proprietor here, Eva Kopasis, speaks excellent English

Dhaskaloyiánnis

Anópoli was the home of the first of the great Cretan rebels against the Turks, **Dhaskaloyiánnis** – the subject of a celebrated epic ballad. To cut a very long story extremely short, Dhaskaloyiánnis, a wealthy ship-owner, was promised support by Russian agents if he raised a rebellion in Sfakiá, support which in the event never materialized. (The Russians hoped only to divert attention from their campaigns against the Ottoman Empire elsewhere.) The revolt, in 1770, was short-lived and disastrous for Sfakiá, which for the first time was brought well and truly under the Turkish heel: Dhaskaloyiánnis went to the Turks in an attempt to negotiate acceptable surrender terms. Instead the Turkish authorities seized and then tortured him in the Cathedral square at Haniá, following which he was skinned alive and executed. There's now a statue honouring him in the square at Anópoli.

A mountainous island

From snow-capped peaks in a Mediterranean spring to gorges whose rock walls are hundreds of metres high, the sheer cragginess of Crete is as magnificent as it is unexpected. A spine of mountains marches through the centre of the island, from the spectacular White Mountains (Lefká Óri) in the west through the central Psilorítis massif to the Dhíkti and Sitía ranges in the east. Indeed most of the island is mountain, and since Minoan times humans have always clung to the few flat places – a narrow coastal strip, numerous high-altitude plateaus, and some fertile plain around Iráklion and Haniá – leaving the peaks to nature, and to the gods. Zeus was born and raised in these mountains, and many of the high sanctuaries where he and his fellow Olympians were honoured have seen four thousand years of continuous worship.



▲ Hiking in the Arádhena Gorge

▲ Flower on Lasíthi plateau

Walking the mountains: the E4 path

There are few places in the world, let alone in Europe, where high mountains so close to the sea combine with an often perfect climate to create a paradise for walkers – whether strolling or on week-long hikes – climbers, bird-watchers, botanists and anyone with an interest in nature. A network of ancient footpaths and shepherds' trails allows you to walk all day and barely see a soul. Yet, should you want to, you can always find a village and call a taxi or catch a bus in time to get to the sea for an evening swim, while Cretan hospitality ensures that wherever you end up you can eat well and spend the night in comfort.

The daddy of Crete's walks is the **E4**, the long-distance European footpath (starting in southern Spain) that traverses the island from west to east, taking in many of the highest peaks en route. To walk the entire length of the island is a severe challenge that takes weeks. There are plenty of sections, however, that are easily accessible and where you can hike for a few hours. Some of the best of these are in the southwest, where the path splits: one branch following the coast and another winding through the heights of the **White Mountains**; the **Samariá Gorge** links the two.

Wherever you are, you'll find somewhere to walk. Easy as it can seem, however, don't be lulled into a false sense of security. The paths are rocky, and it's easy to twist an ankle; you're at altitude so can be brutally exposed, and paths are not always clearly marked. With little shade or shelter the sun can be unforgiving; sturdy footwear and plenty of water are the minimum essentials, and it's unwise to walk alone.

Gorges

One of the most striking features of Crete's topography is the sheer number of **spectacular gorges** that slash their way through the mountains. One of them, the Samariá Gorge, descending to the coast from the heart of the White Mountains, is said to be the longest in Europe, internationally famous, and a magnet for tourism. Yet by some counts there are fifty more gorges in the White Mountains alone, and certainly half a dozen that are really substantial, yet barely visited at all. For the island as a whole, you can double those numbers.

Geologically speaking, Crete's mountains are relatively young, and as they have risen the streams that crossed them have maintained their old courses, slicing a path through the new obstacle. Most lead straight to the sea, especially in the south and far east, where the mountains drop straight to the water. On a hot summer's day, heading down a gorge is the **ideal hike**: shaded from the sun's ferocity, with an empty beach and a welcome swim to reward you at the end. Have someone pick you up so you don't have to toil back up, and you have a perfect day.

Five great gorges:

Arádhena, p.362. One of many in the southwest; a challenging and spectacular walk.
Áyio, p.153. An easy path through a lonely gorge to a great beach.
Kourtaliótiko, p.282. Accessible by road, with large birds of prey and plenty of good walking nearby.
Roúvas, p.137. An inland gorge, climbing towards high mountains where it joins the E4.
Zákros, Gorge of the Dead, p.210. An easy walk down the final stretch of the E4, ending up by a Minoan palace and great beach.

▼ Inside the Dhiktean cave

▲ Wild goats or *kri-kri*

Wildlife

Thanks to its mountains, Crete has an exceptional diversity of **habitats**, and because the heights are far too steep for agriculture, a great deal of it has survived. Of course, humans have had an impact here, above all in **deforestation**, which began when the Minoans began to use the timber to build their ships and was pretty much complete by the Middle Ages. Trees are a rarity, and tourist development and intensive agriculture on the coastal plains have also driven away much wildlife.

Start to climb, however, and you'll soon find an island alive with flora and fauna, including some 2000 species of **plant**, of which perhaps 180 are unique to Crete; hundreds of **birds**, including spectacular birds of prey; lizards and other **reptiles**; plenty of insects; and even some elusive large **mammals**. Of these, the most spectacular are the **Cretan wild cat**, long thought to be extinct but recently rediscovered, and the *kri-kri*, or **wild goat**. Your chances of spotting either are pretty low, but there's plenty of bird and plant life that's easy to find even close to the major resorts.

In spring the slopes are alive with wild **flowers**, while the skies are full of migratory birds and the countryside alive with birdsong. Through the summer, both become more elusive, and birdsong is replaced by the chirping of cicadas. However, this is also when you'll perhaps most easily see Crete's giant birds of prey: golden eagles, the rare and fascinating **lammergeier vulture**, and numerous smaller hawks and buzzards circling above the gorges and higher slopes. For more on Crete's wildlife, see p.445.

▲ Lammergeier vulture

and can advise on walking routes in the area. Both places have good **tavernas** and any of the goat, lamb or sausage dishes here are mouthwatering. *Ta Tria Adelfia* (☎28250 91150; ①), halfway between the two, is another possibility for simpler (and cheaper) rooms if these are full.

From Anópoli you can walk (or even drive with extreme care in a hire car) the 4km track leading southwest to **Livanianá**, a hamlet perched above the lower reaches of the Arádhena Gorge where there's a good taverna, the *Livaniana*, with spectacular views. There's also a path down into the gorge from here (see p.362).

West from Anópoli to Ayía Rouméli

To head for Ayía Rouméli from Anópoli, follow the road through to the far end of the village, where it becomes a little-used, dusty jeep track, signed to Arádhena. There may be shorter ways on the old paths than this track (ask around if you're determined), but there's so little traffic that following the road makes little difference. It takes about thirty minutes to the edge of the **Arádhena Gorge**, 3km away, on the far side of which is the virtually abandoned hamlet of Arádhena. The villagers are said to have left to escape from a series of Sfakiot vendettas, but in the light of what is happening elsewhere, such depopulation seems commonplace. With the new road, one or two people have moved back and started to restore some of the crumbling buildings. Just before the bridge a signed asphalt road on the left heads for Livanianá (above) and Fínix (p.356) eventually joining up with a track from Anópoli; the asphalt only lasts for a couple of kilometers, however, and the track (pretty rough in parts) can be walked or driven in a 4x4.

The first thing to grab your attention when you reach the gorge is the steel **bridge** – a remarkable construction, all the more remarkable when you discover that it's a bridge to nowhere, as the road on the far side soon peters out at nearby Áyios Ioánnis. Constructed in 1986 by the local Vardinoyiannís family, controllers of an international business empire, the bridge was a gift to provide a lifeline to the outside world without which their home village of Áyios Ioánnis would probably have died. Rumble across it in a car and the terrifying crack of the wooden boards against metal thunders around the gorge below. The **views** from the bridge down into the gorge – one of Crete's most precipitous – are vertiginously spectacular. Springing into it from a bungee jump platform now added to the centre of the bridge probably requires nerves of steel, too.

Across the bridge (where there's a drinks *kantína* throughout the summer) and right on the opposite rim of the gorge is the romantically picturesque Byzantine church of **Mihaíl Arhángelos**, with its curious "pepper-pot" dome standing proud against the Lefká Óri's heights. The white-walled church dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century and was constructed on the ruins of a much earlier basilica, of which the central nave and apse may be a part. Inside are some outstanding **frescoes** (torch useful) depicting the life and crucifixion of Christ as well as the church's patron saint. A fairly ancient iconostasis stands in the church's porch. The church is now permanently locked following a number of thefts, and to obtain a key to view it you should make enquiries at Anópoli (try *Taverna Platanias* on the square). Scattered round about and beyond the nearly deserted village are a few traces of ancient Araden, a still unexcavated Greco-Roman town from whose stones the church is said to be built. Looking inland from the churchyard or the bridge you can see the old path, negotiable on foot or by pack animals only, zigzagging down to the bottom and back up the other side, which for well over two millennia was the only way across the gorge. Incidentally, this is still the path you take to follow the gorge down to the sea (see p.362).

The road from the bridge heads westwards for about an hour on foot (5km) to end at **Áyios Ioánnis**, beneath the massed peaks of Páhnes, Troharís and Zaranokefála. A more substantial and outwardly prosperous place since the construction of the bridge, it goes so far as to have a **taverna** on the way in where you can rest up for a while or have a beer at tables beneath shady pines. Dormitory **beds** are also available at *Pension Yioryedakis* (☎28250 91480 or 6938792695; €7), a mountain refuge-style place, which can also provide meals if required. It is located 200m from the taverna taking two left forks beyond this; should you get lost, ask any of the villagers to put you right. Close to the taverna (below the road to the left) are a couple more **Byzantine churches** with fourteenth-century frescoes; the taverna should have keys. There are also several impressively large **caves** nearby.

For the onward walk to Ayía Rouméli, ask to be put on the right track as the way isn't immediately obvious. Generally, you have to head to the left, between two chapels, after which the path becomes hard to follow for a while until it emerges on top of the cliffs. From here it loops down as a rough but obvious path to join the coast trail before the chapel of **Áyios Pávlos** (see p.359). You should be able to complete the approximately seventeen-kilometre walk from Anópoli to Ayía Rouméli in about five hours, though with rest stops and wrong turnings it could well take much longer; leave plenty of leeway if you need to catch a boat back. If you are undertaking this walk in reverse, start early so as to complete the climb of the cliffs before it gets too hot.

The Arádhena Gorge

The superb hike from Loutró, up to Anópoli, through the **Arádhena Gorge** and down to Mármara beach, from where you can get a boat back to Loutró (last at 4pm, or there's a taxi-boat available from the *Yeoryios* taverna at Líkkos beach, a short walk east of Mármara), has been tamed in recent years and even become a target for bus tours. Even so, the full walk is tougher than Samariá, and you must be reasonably fit to tackle it, even if the old ladders and ropes have now been replaced with stone steps to help you over the worst parts. Parts can still be pretty scary too, not helped by the ominous presence of picked-clean skeletons of goats, which presumably have either fallen from the top or been washed away in spring floods. The sense of achievement, however, is immense, and the gorge, though far smaller than that of Samariá, is in physical terms almost as impressive. There isn't much in the way of wildlife, but the rocky river-bed is forced into an extremely narrow gap between sheer walls almost all the way down – and there'll be hardly anyone else around.

Allow **five hours** at least from Loutró to Mármara (two and a half to the top of the gorge, plus the same again down it) adding on an extra ninety minutes if you walk back to Loutró from Mármara. In the heat of summer, and even if you take a boat back, it's more likely to take eight hours once you've stopped a few times. An alternative starting-point is Anópoli: this allows you to get the gorge completed early on in the walk – although once back at Loutró you still have the ninety-minute ascent back to the village, with the possible option of a taxi (about €7) from Hóra Sfakíon if it all becomes too much.

To reach the start of the **descent** into the gorge you set off by turning right off the road and onto the old path, 600m before you reach the gorge and just before the bridge comes in to view. Heading half right across a stony stretch of ground with a small pinewood to the right leads you to the recently repaired stepped path down to the bottom (this side should be used rather than the track on the other side, which is deteriorating fast now it's not used much). This and the first stretch, with its relatively flat bottom as you head under the bridge through an impressively deep section, conspire to lull you into a false sense of security: as it gets steeper further down, you find yourself jumping from rock to rock or taking narrow steps around dry cascades. Look out as you go for the paint marks indicating the route – these often seem to take you over unnecessarily tricky terrain, but you usually discover the reason further on when you reach an impassable portion. Fill up with water at every opportunity, as there's none towards the end of the gorge.

An **easier alternative** from Loutró (about a four-hour round trip, not allowing for pauses) is to head out past Fínix (follow the upper path, bypassing the cove) until you come to a fork in the path: the lower one goes to Líkkos, the upper to Livanianá, which you can see above you. From the village a path beyond a gate just above the church (signed "Mármara") leads down into the gorge, emerging fairly near the bottom having bypassed all the hardest bits. The red markings show you the best path down the gorge, and you'll reach the beach after about 45min walking. The Ímbros ravine (see p.364) is another slightly softer option, with more wildlife but less dramatic terrain.

The road south: to Hóra Sfakíon and Frangokástello

The easy way **into Sfakiá** from the north coast is by a good road which cuts south from Vrísses (p.327), almost immediately beginning to spiral up into the mountains, towards the plateau of Askífou. The climb seems straightforward from a bus or car, but the country you drive through has a history as bloody as any in Crete: you pass first through a little ravine where two Turkish armies were massacred, the first during the 1821 uprising, the second in 1866 after the heroic events at Arkádhi (see p.248); the road itself is the one along which the Allied troops retreated at such cost in the final stages of the Battle of Crete. This chaotic flight has been described in detail in just about all the books covering the battle (and also in Evelyn Waugh's *Officers and Gentlemen*) – it makes for strange reading from the comfort of a modern journey.

Askífou plateau

The **Plateau of Askífou** offers the relief of level ground for a while, now as it did then. The plain is dominated by a ruined Turkish castle on a hill to the left of the road – a hill so small and perfectly conical it looks fake, put there expressly to raise the castle above its surroundings. There are several small villages up here, chief of them **Ammoudhári**, with a couple of small tavernas and the chance of a room if you wanted to stay (one place, over the bakery, tends to be noisy in the morning; the only other disturbance to the peace here is the twice-daily convoy of buses, arriving empty and returning with sated gorge-walkers).

For keen **walkers**, a path leads from **Petrés**, immediately south of Ammoudhári to Anópoli, a long day's hike (18km) through the mountains via the hamlet of **Kalí Láki**, beyond where the path follows a rough track to reach Anópoli. Though detailed on the Petrákis *Haniá Trekking and Road Map* and now on the larger scale Anavasi *Lefká Óri* (maps 10.11 and 10.12) series (see p.65 for both), it's not a terribly easy route to follow, and you should attempt to get thorough directions locally before trying this, though this may not be easy unless you speak fluent Greek. A branch of the E4 Pan-European footpath also heads through Ammoudhári: to the west it climbs into the foothills of the Lefká Óri – initially easy walking with good opportunities for bird-spotting and then climbing seriously into the heart of the mountains to eventually reach the Kallergi Hut (p.346), a two-day trek with a possible overnight stop at the Katsiveli refuge (if open). In the other direction the E4 heads south across the plain to Ímbros, where one branch follows the gorge down to meet the coastal path, or you can head east to Asféndou and from there to Asigonía (p.255). A shorter route leads east from Ammoudhári to the nearby village of **Goní**, from where a track leads to Asigonía, some 10km away.

In **Askífou**, right at the heart of the plateau, there are more tavernas and homemade signs to an equally homemade Battle of Crete **museum**. Gathered in the private house of enthusiastic collector Yiorgos Hatzidakis, who witnessed the German invasion as a child, this is an extraordinary and fascinating jumble of weapons, helmets, badges and photos, much of it picked up in the immediate area. Don't miss the *Norton* motorbike captured by the Germans from the Allies and then put to work for the invading forces. There's no charge – though donations are welcome – and you may well be offered a *raki* and a biscuit while you browse. Should you fancy an **overnight stay** here the incongruously luxurious *Lefkoritis Resort* (Ⓣ28250 95455, Ⓦwww.lefkoritis.com; ③), sited on the main road, has stone built apartments with TV, minibar, wooden ceilings and spectacular balcony views as well as some pricier larger apartments (⑦); there's also a restaurant and bar, and all kinds of activities are on offer ranging from horse and mountain bike riding to organized hikes.

Ímbros and the Ímbros ravine

On the far side of the Askífou plateau lies the village of **Ímbros**, the entry point for the Ímbros ravine. For years there was little here apart from a couple of tavernas flanking the road through – *Taverna Faragi* (on the west side of the road) does a great *sfakianópita* (Sfakian cheese pie with honey). But the gorge has become far more popular in recent years, with a branch of the E4 running down it and an increasing number of coach tours, and there are signs of development. There are two excellent **rooms** places, allowing a night's stay in utter rural tranquillity before attempting the gorge. The first, *Hotel Tsapakis* (Ⓣ28250 95372; ②), down a track opposite the *Taverna Faragi* on the way to the gorge entrance, has en-suite balcony rooms; the other, the newly renovated and very comfortable *Hotel Zervos* (Ⓣ28250 95244; ②), is located 200m further along the road south, on the left. A further 300m south of here (and beside another gorge entrance) is *Taverna Porofarago*, a good **taverna** with a pleasant terrace and which also does breakfasts.

The **gorge walk** is clearly signed from Ímbros village, although the official **entrance** to the ravine is some 500m to the south, by the *Café-Taverna Porofarago* (see above; if you have a vehicle, you can park it here while you do the walk). From here a well-trodden trail descending to the stream bed passes a booth where you will be charged an entry fee of €2 (April–Oct 7am–sunset; free outside this period). The money raised goes to support the maintenance of the gorge and village projects.

Once in the gorge, you are following a **track** which, until the completion of the new road, was the district's main thoroughfare. The hike to the end – emerging at the village of Komitádhes – is easily enough done in less than three hours, and, provided you don't coincide with a tour bus (to be sure of which, set out early), it can still be a wonderfully quiet walk, certainly in contrast to the crowds at Samariá. The only problem is that you miss the magnificent views available from the road above. In its own way the ravine is as interesting as its better-known rival, albeit on a smaller scale: narrow and stiflingly confined in places, speckled with caves in others and at one point passing under a monumental, natural stone archway. Through the ravine you simply follow the stream until, emerging at the lower end, an obvious track leads away again towards the village of Komitádhes.

Komitádhes itself is full of huge, usually empty tavernas waiting for the occasional tour party to arrive. At any of them you can get something to eat and drink while you recover from your exertions, and they'll order you a taxi if you want to be taken back up to Ímbros (about €20) or on to Hóra Sfakíon (about €10).

You can also walk to Hóra Sfakíon easily enough, though this final 5km makes a hot, boring anticlimax to what has gone before. It's possible to walk the gorge as a half-day trip from Hóra Sfakíon (or Loutró, by getting the first boat from there): simply take the early bus to Haniá, and get off at Ímbros.

South to the coast

South of Ímbros, the road climbs briefly again out of the plain and then begins gradually to descend to the south coast. This stretch is lovely: an excellent, winding route which follows dramatically one side of the Ímbros ravine, tracking high through conifer-clad slopes with the cleft always dizzily below. As you approach the **coast**, still high above it, you begin to glimpse distant sparkles of water until finally the road breaks out of its confinement, way above the sea, with a broad plain to the east (and Frangokástello hazy in the distance), steeper drops to the west, and immense vistas out towards Africa ahead. Hóra Sfakíon is out of sight until you are almost upon it, an alarming plunge down through hairpin bend after hairpin bend. If you're driving, you need to watch out for buses: it can be alarming in the evening meeting the vast convoy coming the other way on these relatively narrow curves, and in the afternoon you'll pass them parked in every available spot since they can't all squeeze into Hóra Sfakíon. Should you be arriving here with your own transport and the needle is quivering around empty, a **garage** is sited just after where the road turns west along the coast towards Hóra Sfakíon.

The guns of Crete

Cretans are some of the most mild-mannered and genial people on the planet, and it oftens comes as a surprise to visitors to discover that the population of Crete is one of the most heavily armed in the world – although the bullet-pockmarked road signs all over the island should have given a clue. Get to know someone well and he will soon be telling you about his stock of **weapons**, including perhaps arms handed down in the family from the wars against the Turks, and more recently against the Germans in World War II. When the German army quit the island after their defeat, they left behind a huge arsenal of guns such as Mauser pistols, which still change hands for considerable sums. The authorities are all too aware that in wilder areas such as Sfakiá every household has at least one gun and most possess veritable armouries of weapons, including machine guns and the latest status symbol, a Russian Kalashnikov. It would be pointless for the authorities to try to confiscate all these guns, as it is already illegal to keep a weapon without a permit – most people simply ignore the law.

Crete is certainly not a violent society, although in areas such as Sfakiá feuding and vendettas often do lead to arms being used to settle disputes. It's likely that this urge to own guns has much to do with Cretan history, which has seen the island defending itself against a succession of invaders, from Dorians and Romans to Venetians, Turks and Germans. Many islanders will tell of how, at Máleme when the German parachutists invaded, their fathers and grandfathers were reduced to fighting the German infantry with axes, spades and pitchforks – "never again" is the oft-quoted reason for hanging on to their weapons. However, the only time that most of these weapons are brought out in public today is at weddings or baptisms when salvos of expensive ammunition are blasted skywards in honour of the bridegroom, bride or baptized infant – this signals that the shooter values friends and family so much that he is willing in one evening to send a whole month's wages up in smoke. Even this practice is increasingly rare – and officially illegal – following a couple of fatal accidents.

Hóra Sfakíon

Squeezed between the sea and the mountains, **HÓRA SFAKÍON** (often known simply as Hóra, meaning "chief town") couldn't grow even if it wanted to. Nevertheless it's a surprise to find the capital of Sfakiá quite so small. It is, though, a thoroughly commercial centre these days: restaurants cram the sea-front promenade between the square where the **buses** stop and the pier where the **boats** dock, and every house in town seems to display a large "Rooms" sign. Although it is cheap and pleasant if you do decide to stay, and relatively quiet by the end of the day, the beach is small and pebbly (although there is a much better pebbly cove beach at the western end of town) and there is little else to distract you.

Supposedly, Hóra once had as many as a hundred churches and chapels, built for one reason or another by devout Sfakiots, but few survived the wartime bombardments. There are a couple of ancient-looking examples on the road as you curve down into Hóra, but all seem permanently locked. As for other monuments, a **plaque** on the east side of the bay commemorates the Dunkirk-style wartime evacuation, when some ten thousand Allied troops were taken off the island: almost as many were left behind to be sitting ducks as they waited to be taken prisoner or to escape as best they could. Many of the inhabitants who aided the operation were later dealt with brutally by German execution squads. A memorial opposite *Rooms Panorama* on the bend above the town commemorates their bravery; as is the custom here, the skulls of the dead are visible behind a window in the monument's base.

If you have time to spare, you're probably best off getting out to Sweetwater Beach (see p.356), an hour along the coast path west (or accessible by twice-daily boat), or to Frangokástello (see opposite), 14km east. The coast road to the east runs some way from the sea through a series of small, little-visited villages: Komitádhes has a couple of tavernas and even a few rooms, but Vraskás and Voúvas can offer no more than a *kafenío* and a general store each. It's also possible to visit the **Cave of Dhaskaloyiánnis**, one of several large caves in the cliffs to the west of Hóra. Always a hideout in times of trouble, this was where the rebel leader (see p.360) set up a mint to produce revolutionary coinage. Sfakiá Tours or the Travellers Service Centre (see below) will provide directions on how to reach it, and also have information about local boats that can take you there if you don't fancy the hike.

Practicalities

The road into Hóra Sfakíon ends at a small square just above the water. Here the bus will drop you, and there are expensive paid **parking** spaces (short-term immediately above the square, long-term around the bay to the east). Directly ahead the *Casa Delfini* café/restaurant is an obvious landmark: beside it are the **post office** (Mon–Fri 7.30am–2pm) and one of several small **supermarkets**, which also sells foreign **press**, and outside of which is a sometimes temperamental **ATM**. Otherwise you can **change money** at many of the hotels or at the Travellers Service Centre (Ⓣ28250 91044), on the west side of the square, who will charge you a fee for money obtained on a credit card (if the ATM isn't functioning). Both here and Sfakiá Tours (Ⓣ28250 91272), next to the *Casa Delfini*, are useful sources of **information** on everything going on locally, and the latter also does car hire and can find accommodation. The Travellers Service Centre also has a decent selection of **secondhand books**. A useful website for this zone with lots of information is Ⓦwww.sfakia-crete.com.

There are basically just two pedestrian streets leading off the square into town, one along the waterfront with an unbroken row of **tavernas** leading round to the harbour, the other just inland, with shops and rooms as well as more places to eat. Practically the first building here is an excellent **bakery**, and there's also a supermarket with better prices than those on the front, a dairy shop for local cheese, yoghurt and honey, and several exchange places. Finding **food** is never a problem here, and all the tavernas seem to have a good array of **vegetarian** food, such as *bouréki* and vegetable-stuffed aubergines. Of the waterfront choices, the *Lefka Ori* in the corner of the harbour probably has the best seafood along with the *Xenia* (see below), whose fish is caught with their own boat. *Limani*, between these two, is another good place for *dákos*, seafood including a tasty octopus salad and vegetarian options. Away from the water, *Tria Adelfia* (see below) is also worth trying for spit-roasted lamb, moussaká and *loukánika* sausages. The same taverna's café, overlooking the little cove beach on the west edge of town, is a pleasant, quiet spot for a sundowner, and also has **Internet** connections.

Rooms are better and cheaper if you avoid the obvious places right on the front or the main road. Good places to try for rooms with bath are the central *Hotel Stavris* (Ⓣ28250 91220, Ⓔ Stavris@sfakia-crete.com; ①), just off the square behind the waterfront tavernas or – following the inland street around – *Tria Adelfia* (Ⓣ28250 91040, Ⓦwww.three-brothers-sfakia-crete.com; ②), with comfortable, air-conditioned, en-suite rooms and apartments (③). Also inland from the harbour *Sofia Rooms* (Ⓣ28250 91259; ①) has the cheapest rates in town for rooms sharing bath. Just behind the ferry dock, the recently refurbished and excellent-value *Hotel Xenia* (Ⓣ28250 91202, Ⓕ28250 91491; ②), a former state-owned hotel with the best location in town, offers modern, air-conditioned balcony sea-view rooms with fridge and TV, and there are steps at the rear to a small beach. The attractive terrace of its bar-taverna is also *the* place to watch harbour comings and goings.

Boat tickets are sold from a cabin in the car park near the bus stop: check which ferry you'll be getting, as the *Samaria* is too big for the dock and comes in instead right on the other side of town, quite a long way to run if you're waiting in the wrong place. Daily services run to Loutró and Áyia Rouméli in season (at 10.30am, 1pm & 4.55pm, also at 7pm June–Sept only); there are also departures to Gávdhos on Saturday and Sunday from May to October at 10.30am (additional service Fri June–Sept, and Thurs July–Aug), and a little boat to Sweetwater Beach at 10am daily (tickets on the boat). Ring Ⓣ28210 95511 for the Gávdhos boat winter schedule. **Bus tickets** are now sold on the bus, but as most people already have tickets the important thing is to get on the bus in order to secure a seat. The south-coast bus east to Plakiás leaves at 11am and 6pm in summer only, and the 6pm one is often even more crowded. A **taxi-boat** is available from the *Samaria* taverna on the waterfront.

Frangokástello

FRANGOKÁSTELLO lies 14km east of Hóra Sfakíon, about 3km south of the road heading east towards Plakiás (for a description of this route, see p.289). A series of isolated dwellings dotted across a plain between the mountains and the Libyan sea, it's a curious place to arrive in as there's no real centre or square as such, leaving you with little option but to head for the castle, the imposing silhouette of which comes into view long before anything else. Despite its lack of a focus, for peaceful lassitude the **beach** at Frangokástello is still among the best spots in Crete, with fine sand, crystal-clear water (with good snorkelling opportunities), and very little effort required either to get here or to find food and drink once you've arrived.

Once on the beach, if you want company you'll find it around the castle, where the best part of the sand is sheltered and slowly shelving. For solitude, head west-

△ Frangokástello fort

wards along the shoreline, where there's less soft sand and more wind, but it's still very pleasant. There are beaches to the east too: follow the coastal path for ten to fifteen minutes and you'll arrive at the top of a low cliff overlooking perhaps a kilometre of beautiful, deserted sand and rocks. Lying in the sun here the only thing to disturb the afternoon tranquillity is the occasional muffled crump of an explosion offshore, emanating from the homemade depth charges of local fishermen going about their business in the time-honoured and highly illegal way. Watch closely, and you'll see the sudden spout of water near the boat before the noise of the explosion reaches you.

The **castle**, so impressively four-square from a distance, turns out close up to be a mere shell. Nothing but the bare walls survive, with a tower in each corner and, over the seaward entrance, an escutcheon which can just be made out as the Venetian lion of St Mark. Still, it's some shell. The fortress was originally built in 1371 to deter pirates and in an attempt to impose some order on Sfakiá: a garrison was maintained here throughout the Venetian and Turkish occupations, controlling the plain as surely as it failed to tame the mountains – even today, the orange-pink walls look puny when you see them with the grey bulk of the mountains towering behind. In 1828, Frangokástello was occupied by **Hadzimihali Daliani**, a Greek adventurer attempting to spread the War of Independence from the mainland to Crete. Instead of taking to the hills as all sensible rebels before and since have done, he and his tiny force attempted to make a stand in the castle. Predictably, they were massacred and their martyrdom became fuel for yet more heroic legends of the *pallikári*. Locals claim that to this day, around May 17, the ghosts of Daliani and his army march from the castle: they are known as *dhrossoulítes*, or dewy ones, because they appear in the mists around dawn.

Just below the castle, before the beach, there's a patch of greenery which shades a **taverna**, *Fata Morgana*, and a tiny freshwater creek with thoroughly incongruous ducks on it. Between the road and sea to the west are more little streams and marshy patches like this, home to terrapins and some type of water snake or eel.

Practicalities

Many of the places to stay and other facilities at Frangokástello lie along the road that heads in from Hóra Sfakíon: carry on past these and a turn-off immediately before the castle leads to another little group of seaside rooms places and tavernas. If you're approaching from the east, the monstrous two-storey *Taverna Kriti* ruins most views of the castle: continue past it, and the castle, to find the places listed below.

Places to stay very close to the castle include *Milos* (Ⓣ28250 92160, Ⓦwww.milos-sfakia.com; ②), with a variety of well-located en-suite rooms including the tiny mill after which the place is named, which stands right on the beach and has been refurbished as accommodation consisting of a kitchen/diner and bathroom downstairs, with a bedroom and balcony above (④). Also close to the beach, *Maria's* (Ⓣ28250 92159, Ⓦwww.marias-studios.com; ②) is a well-equipped modern block with en-suite rooms, with air conditioning and TV, plus some larger apartments (④);*Flisvos* (Ⓣ28250 92069, Ⓦwww.frangokastello-flisvos.co; ②), a beachfront taverna with air-conditioned en-suite rooms set back a little, also has apartments (④) as well as a house (⑥) in the nearby village of Patsianós. The *Kali Kardia* taverna (Ⓣ28250 92123; ①), also on the sea between these and the castle, has rather more basic rooms with air conditioning. On the road in from Hóra, one of the first places you pass is the excellent *Studios Stavris* (Ⓣ28250 92250, Ⓦwww.studios-stavris-frangokastello.com; ③), whose beachfront rooms have air-conditioning, bath and cooking facilities, though they can be booked up by tour groups. Soon after this a left turn leads to *Blue Sky* (Ⓣ28250 92095, Ⓦwww.blue-sky-kreta.de), run by a friendly Greek-German couple who rent out well-equipped apartments sleeping up to six (⑥, but rarely available for less than a week) and also rent **cars**, **scooters** and **mountain bikes** and act as something of a local **information** centre. The *Oasis* taverna (Ⓣ28250 92244, Ⓔoasis@aias.gr; ①), between *Stavris* and *Blue Sky*, has more rooms and apartments (②). The friendly *Babis & Popi* (Ⓣ28250 92092, Ⓦwww.babis-popi.com; ①–②), a little further down the road, also has very nice en-suite sea-view rooms (with mosquito nets), both with and without air conditioning next to a good taverna with a pleasant terrace and a path leading from here to the beach; they also have some attractive apartments (⑤). Wherever you stay, be warned that this can be a **mosquito zone**, so make sure to come prepared if this is likely to bother you.

For **eating** and **drinking**, most of your options lie within a few minutes' walk of the castle, and most of the better choices have already been mentioned above: *Kali Kardia* started life as the village's *kafenío*, and is still the place you're most likely to see locals, as well as being good for **breakfast**, drinks and snacks. *Flisvos* has perhaps the best location and can usually offer good fresh fish: *Babis & Popi*, *Oasis* and *Corali*, with fish from its own boat, are all reliable. An interesting new arrival is a taverna attached to *Blue Sky* (above), which serves some creative dishes (such as *kotópoulo me síka*, or chicken with figs) as well as fish. **Nightlife** mostly consists of stretching supper well into the night, or perhaps taking a bottle of *raki* down to the beach to contemplate the stars. The *Blue Sky* has a daytime combined café and ice-cream salon with its own **pool** (free to clients and sheltered when the wind blows); while the *Taverna Kriti*, opposite the castle, has music but is soulless and usually empty. Keep it that way and maybe they'll knock the place down. There are also a couple of **minimarkets**, selling most things you're likely to want.

In summer the daily **buses** between Hóra Sfakíon and Plakiás call at Frangokástello on their way through in both directions.

The far west

Crete's **far west** has, to date, attracted surprisingly little attention from tourists or developers, and even though that is inevitably beginning to change, such development as there is consists of mostly low-key apartments and rooms rather than big hotels. The one town of any size west of Haniá is **Kastélli Kissámou**, a port with a ferry service to the Peloponnese, very regular buses to Haniá and a fine new museum. Beyond, Crete's west-facing coast remains remote: west of a line between Kastélli and Paleohóra there's little public transport, and despite a growing number of rooms and apartments, virtually nothing in the way of luxurious facilities. Yet here you'll find two of the finest **beaches** on the island – **Falásarna** and **Elafonísi** – both of them, sadly, beginning to suffer from overexploitation. Inland, the wooded hill country around **Élos** – with the possibility of a stay nearby at the remarkable tourist mountain village of **Miliá** – is one of the greenest parts of Crete, and for walkers there's another ravine to explore at **Koutsamatádos**. For longer stays in this part of Crete it's important to carry all the money and most of the supplies you'll need – there are some facilities at the beaches, but villages are few and far between, and have only the most basic of shops.

On the **south coast**, good roads and several buses a day run to **Paleohóra** and **Soúyia**. The former is already a resort of some size – surprisingly large given its isolation, but far from totally despoiled – the latter is smaller and not as immediately attractive but still inexpensive and friendly. Regular boats connect the two, or you can follow the **E4 footpath** by way of the ruins of ancient **Lissós**, on the coast just west of Soúyia. Roads in this part of the island have been dramatically improved in recent years, and there are some spectacular, if roundabout, routes from Paleohóra to Soúyia and on to Omalós (for the White Mountains and the Samariá Gorge). Along the way, and on other minor roads through the mountains, are isolated villages in which frescoed medieval churches are liberally scattered. For **hiking** here, a new publication, *Western Crete* by Alan Hall (see Books p.462), details over forty walks in the areas of Kissámou and Sélinos.

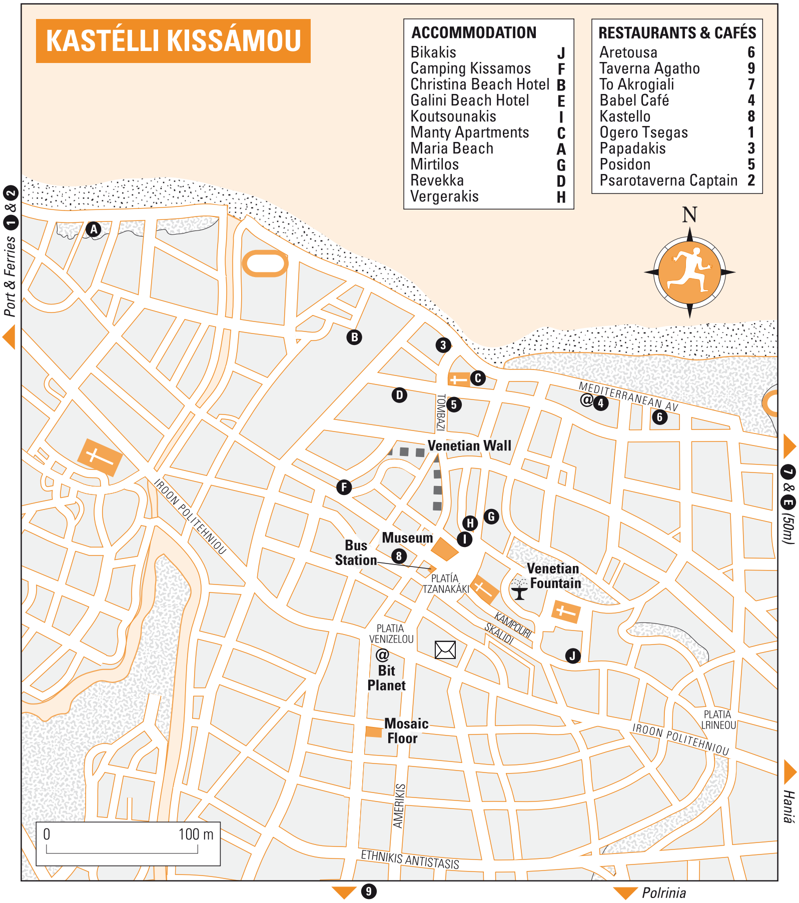
Kastélli Kissámou and the north coast

Kastélli lies some 20km beyond the crossroads at Kolimbári (see p.337). If you're in a hurry to head west, the new highway is fast and efficient, taking you right to the edge of Kastélli, where it finally ends. It has also left the **old road** – always a beautiful drive – as a delightful backwater. Going this way you wind steeply up a rocky spur thrown back by the peninsula and emerge through a cleft in the hills to a magnificent view of the Gulf of Kissámou, with Kastélli in the middle distance. Caught with the sun setting behind the craggy heights of **Cape Voúxa** at the far west of Crete, this is a memorable panorama. There's a roadside restaurant from which you can contemplate the view, and further along a number of quite large, entirely unvisited villages, such as Nochiá, Koléni or Kaloudhianá, where you could also stop for a drink or a bite to eat at a number of inviting tavernas.

As it leaves the height, the road loops back out of the hills onto the fertile plain of Kastélli. Almost as soon as you hit level ground you'll see turnings to the beach, a long stretch of grey sand which, while not the best in Crete, is at least clean and uncrowded. There are scattered rooms places here, and two attractive **campsites** on the coast about 1km from the road. Both are well-equipped and reasonably priced: the first you reach, the newer *Camping Nopigia* (☎28220 311110) near the village of Nopíyia, has a pool, while towards Dhrapaniás *Camping Mithimna* (☎28220 31444) is bigger, and also has apartments and rooms to rent nearby (from ②). There's a regular bus service to and from Kastélli, and though the sites are popular with people arriving in Kastélli on the ferry, there should always be space (a third campsite can be found in Kastélli itself). *Mithimna* takes its name from the ancient Minoan town of Mithymna, thought to have been approximately where Nopíyia now stands, and excavations at the side of the road near the junction have revealed a Minoan building. The village of Kaloudhianá, 4km further along, marks the turn-off for the inland route to Topólia and Elafonísi.

Kastélli Kissámou

KASTÉLLI (also known as Kíssamos, and officially Kastélli Kissámou) seems at first sight to offer little to get excited about. It's a busy little town and port with


KASTÉLLI KISSÁMOU
N
Port & Ferries ① & ②
A
B
3
C
D
5
TOMBAZI
@ 4
MEDITERRANEAN AV
6
Venetian Wall
F
H
G
I
IROON POLITEHNIOU
Bus Station
Museum
8
PLATÍA TZANAKÁKI
Venetian Fountain
KAMPOURI
SKALIDI
J
PLATIA VENIZELOU
@ Bit Planet
Mosaic Floor
PLATIA LRINEOU
IROON POLITEHNIOU
AMERIKIS
ETHNIKIS ANTISTASIS
0
100 m
⑦ & Ⓔ (50m)
Haniá
⑨
Polrinia

ACCOMMODATION	
Bikakis	J
Camping Kissamos	F
Christina Beach Hotel	B
Galini Beach Hotel	E
Koutsounakis	I
Manty Apartments	C
Maria Beach	A
Mirtilos	G
Revekka	D
Vergerakis	H

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS	
Aretousa	6
Taverna Agatho	9
To Akrogiali	7
Babel Café	4
Kastello	8
Ogero Tsegas	1
Papadakis	3
Posidon	5
Psarotaverna Captain	2

a long sea front, a rather rocky strand to the east and a small sandy beach to the west. This very ordinariness, however, has real charm once you get over your initial reaction: it's a working town full of stores used by locals and cafés not entirely geared to outsiders. **Kísamos** was the Greco-Roman city-state that stood here in ancient times – the name *Kissámou* ("of Kísamos") was appended to plain Kastélli in 1966 to avoid confusion with towns of the same name throughout Greece. Ongoing excavations in the town centre – whose finds are displayed in an outstanding new **museum** – are now revealing just how important the ancient city was.

Arrival and information

On the western outskirts the old and new roads merge to head straight through town as Iróon Politehníou, south of the centre. The new road is lined with stores and supermarkets, but the heart of life is towards the sea, around **Platía Tzanakáki** (aka Platía Kastellioú). This is also where the **buses** pull in. There are a couple of banks, cafés and car hire places on Platía Venizélou on the main road, but it's more attractive, and there are more facilities, if you head down to the central square and the main street that runs through it, **Odhós Skálidi**. There's a further cluster of development along the **waterfront**, directly down from the main square, with an attractive promenade separating the town's **beaches** to the east and west.

All the facilities you're likely to need can be found on Platía Tzanakáki or nearby, especially east along Skálidi. There are a couple of **banks** with ATMs on Skálidi, as well as a machine at the National Bank on Platía Venizélou; the **post office** (Mon–Fri 7.30am–2pm) lies east along Iróon Politehníou from here. There are phonecard **telephone kiosks** near the bus station and around the centre, and a bookshop with foreign newspapers and some English books on Skálidi east of the square. **Internet** access is available at the *Babel Café* (10am–9pm) on the waterfront, at the campsite and most efficiently and centrally at *Bit Planet* (10am–midnight) on Platía Venizélou. For **bike rental**, try the reliable Moto Fun (ⓣ28220 23440) on Platía Tzanakáki; **car hire** from Kíssamos Travel on Platía Venizélou (ⓣ28220 23740) or Hermes (ⓣ28220 23678) or Horeftakis (ⓣ28220 23250) on Skálidi. The main **taxi** rank is on Platía Venizélou, or call ⓣ28220 22990.

Ferry tickets for boat connections with Kíthira and Yíthio can be bought from several agents on Skálidi, including Horeftakis Tours (see above) and Halkiada (ⓣ28220 22009); the **ferry dock** is some 3km west of town – a significant walk if you're heavily laden, or a cheap taxi-ride. At least three companies also run **day-trips** to the island of Gramvoúsa and Balos Bay from here (departures between 9.30 and 11am; €20). Try to avoid Thursday and Friday, when coach trips arrive from the rest of the island; tickets are available from travel agents in town, on the quayside, or call ⓣ28220 83311, 23932 or 24344. In spring and autumn **walking tours** of the surrounding country are offered by Strata Tours (ⓣ28220 23700): more information at *To Kelari* taverna on the waterfront.

Accommodation

Kastélli has an abundance of **accommodation** that is rarely filled to capacity, even in high season. The beachside places tend to fill before those in town.

Argo On the central sea front ⓣ28220 23563. Great location for sea-view, a/c, en-suite balcony rooms with fridge and TV. ④

Bikakis Kampouri, east of the centre ⓣ28220 24257, ⓦwww.familybikakis.gr. The unattractive frontage on the street conceals the fact that at the back there are quiet rooms with uninterrupted sea views. Family-run, with a variety of well-equipped, a/c rooms and studios as well as cheaper rooms sharing bath; the owner often meets the ferry, and will collect you on request. ①–②

Camping Kissamos West of the centre ⓣ28220 22322, ⓦwww.campingkissamos.gr. Small but well-equipped site with shade, a nice pool, and a lively café-bar, plus some very pleasant en-suite a/c rooms. It can get busy, as it's an obvious first stop for people who bring cars and campervans across on the ferry from Yíthio. ②

Christina Beach Hotel On the central sea front Ⓣ 28220 83333, Ⓦ www.christina-beach.gr. Balcony, sea-view, one- and two-room apartments around a pool with facilities such as kitchenette, fridge, hairdryer, room safe and TV. ⑦

Galini Beach Hotel On the eastern beach, just past the football pitch Ⓣ 28220 23288, Ⓦ www.galinibeach.com. Friendly, good-value hotel with easy parking, sparkling en-suite, a/c, sea-view balcony rooms with TV, and bounteous breakfasts; discount available to *Rough Guide* readers. ③ with breakfast.

Koutsounakis Platía Tzanakáki Ⓣ Ⓕ 28220 22064. Pleasant en-suite rooms place with airy balcony rooms, some with a good view and fridge. It's reached up steps alongside the museum. If there's no one around enquire at the ironmonger's store below. ②

Manty Apartments On the central sea front Ⓣ 28220 22825. Complex built round a tiny pool: balcony rooms with a/c, TV and separate kitchen/diner are worth considering for a longer stay – those on higher floors tend to escape the late-night noise from the terrace bar downstairs. ④ with breakfast.

Maria Beach On the western beach Ⓣ 28220 22610, Ⓦ www.mariabeach.gr. The best location in town, right on the sandy beach. A couple of separate buildings include some fairly plain rooms as well as new, fully-equipped, sea-view studios and apartments complete with kitchen and a/c. ④ with breakfast.

Mirtilos Platía Tzanakáki Ⓣ 28220 023079, Ⓦ www.mirtilos.com. Attractive new apartment complex round a large pool, right off the main square. Often block-booked in high season, but worth trying at other times – all apartments with a/c, TV and kitchenette. ④

Revekka A block back from the sea front Ⓣ 28220 24213. Balcony rooms with bath and fridge which are much nicer than the view from outside suggests. ②

Vergerakis (aka *Jimmy's*) Platía Tzanakáki Ⓣ 28220 22663. A couple of small but pleasant doubles sharing bath are among the cheapest rooms in town. Also some en-suite rooms and use of kitchen. Friendly and clean. ②

The Archeological Museum

Kastélli's major attraction since its opening with much fanfare in the autumn of 2006 is a splendid **Archeological Museum** (Tues–Sun 8.30am–3pm; free). Housed in the former Venetian governor's palace on the focal Platía Tzanakáki, the lower floor exhibits finds from the pre-historic and Minoan periods as well as items from Polyrínia (see p.375) through to the destruction of the town by a gigantic earthquake in 365 AD.

However, it is the second floor – devoted to the Roman town – that holds the highlights of the collection. Here laid out in Room 4 are two spectacular **Roman mosaics** from the period when Kastélli (or Kísamos as its Hellenic-Romano predecessor was known) thrived as an important municipality in the Roman Empire. During the first and second centuries many wealthy aristocrats constructed luxurious urban villas in the town and embellished them with sculptures, frescoes, inlaid marble floors (*opus sectilis*) and fine mosaics. Many examples of these arts and crafts have been assembled in the museum but it is the mosaics that steal the show. The huge polychromatic, so-called **Dyonysiac mosaic** covers most of Room 4 and depicts various scenes in a Dyonysiac ritual. Interestingly, the mosaic had been restored many times by the various owners of the villa that housed it.

However, the museum's star exhibit is the mosaic of **Horae and the Seasons**, which must rank as one of the finest mosaics yet found on Crete. A brilliant work whose colours are still remarkably vivid after nearly two millennia, it was discovered in the *triclinium* (dining room) of the same villa. The almost perfectly complete mosaic depicts a trio of *horae* (goddesses of the seasons) performing a dance. There were only three seasons (spring, summer and winter) in the old Hellenic division of the year but at the four corners of the mosaic the mosaicist has added depictions of the four seasons of later antiquity. The mosaic is of the highest quality, but these mosaics are only a foretaste of what is to come. At least a dozen other mosaics of equal splendour have been discovered in recent excavations throughout the town but the museum has no space to exhibit them. There are now plans to open an extension of the museum using one of the excavation sites nearby which would allow some mosaics to be viewed in situ. Kísamos was a key centre of mosaic production, and once all the floors are on display this will undoubtedly become one of Greece's most important museums of Greco-Roman mosaics.

The rest of the town

Originally the port of nearby Polyrínia, Kísamos grew to become the more powerful city and, as you walk around, evidence of the **archeological excavations** which have revealed substantial remains of the ancient town (and more mosaics) are to be seen at numerous places. However, as the mosaics have now been covered in sand and gravel to protect them until they are removed for display in the museum (see above) all you can do is stare at the dirt, a few foundation walls and the odd stretch of ancient roadway, through a chain-link fence.

More worthwhile are remnants of the Venetian and Ottoman town. Immediately north of Platía Tzanakáki, where the ground falls sharply away towards the coast, are substantial **defensive bastions**, and there are other bits of surviving wall nearby, particularly to the west of the square. There's also a beautiful old **Venetian fountain,** inscribed with the date 1520, about 100m east of the main square in a small courtyard to the left off Kampouri.

One **shop** worth a visit is Fotografias Anifandakis, slightly east of the main square along Skálidi, where veteran photographer Yeóryios Anifandakis has his studio. He's photographed most of the island during his long career and sells his photos here, including some excellent ones of the recently discovered Roman mosaics (maybe your only chance to see them). West along Skálidi are other interesting stores: Eirini Paskali stocks musical instruments, including *lyras*, as well as a selection of tinted glass oil-burning church lamps; Níkos Lainakis sells a huge variety of products made from olive wood, from salad bowls and candle holders to toys and hair clips.

Eating and drinking

There's no shortage of **places to eat** in Kastélli, but the best of them tend to be away from the centre; many of the sea-front places are disappointing. For light meals and breakfasts, though, the area around Platía Tzanakáki offers plenty of choice. There are a couple of good **bakeries** here too; one in the short street between Platía Venizélou and Platía Tzanakáki, another, *To Haniotis*, nearby on the corner of Platía Tzanakáki. Next door to the latter is a nameless snackbar with tables out in the square, good for **breakfast**. Wherever you eat, you'll probably be offered some of the local **red wine**. Made from the *roméïko* grape, believed to have been brought to the island by the Venetians, it is as good as any produced on Crete.

Although the central sea-front area often has a listless, end-of-season air by day, it comes to life at night when the locals pile in to drink at the numerous **cafés and bars** along the central promenade. *Teloneio* and the *Babel Café* are among the most enjoyable of these.

Taverna Agatho About a kilometre inland along the road to Lousakiés ☎28220 22844. A little family-run village restaurant where they speak only Greek, but you're guaranteed the warmest of welcomes and a delicious spread. Eves only.

To Akrogiali On the coast east, about 1km beyond the *Galini Beach* hotel ☎28220 31410. A fish restaurant worth seeking out for excellent fresh seafood, served on a terrace with the waves almost lapping your table legs. It's hard to miss as it's located immediately east of a sea-front soap factory whose chimney stacks are visible from some distance. They also have rooms here.

Aretousa At the eastern end of the sea-front promenade ☎28220 23569. Serving both fish as well as Greek standard dishes with a flourish, this recent arrival is now the best of the in-town tavernas. Also has a decent wine list and a pleasant terrace.

Kastello Skálidi 96, immediately west of Platía Tzanakákis (behind the museum). Good *souvláki* and *yíros* are served in a small garden.

O Gero Tsegas (aka *Katerina's*) At the small-boat and fishing harbour (see *Captain*). More expensive fish restaurant than *Captain*, with sometimes eccentric service.

Papadakis At the western end of the seafront promenade. The best choice at this end of the sea front, with decent, reasonably priced seafood and courteous service. You can also bring your own wine.

Psarotaverna Captain At the small-boat and fishing harbour, about halfway to the main port, a short drive or taxi-ride west of town ☎28220 22857. Probably the best fish in town and always busy, so booking is advisable.

Polyrínia

Kastélli Kissámou's name is taken from ancient Kísamos, which once stood here and served as a port for the sizeable ancient city of **Polyrínia**, located about 7km inland above the village of Paleókastro (which is confusingly also known as Polirinía). Vestiges of the ancient settlement can still be seen. There are **buses** up from Kastélli Kissámou (Mon, Wed & Fri 7am & 2pm; returning 30min later), but the walk is perfectly feasible; your best bet is to take a bus or taxi up, and walk back down. In spring, especially, it's a lovely walk, with alpine flowers and abundant water from springs.

It's something of a climb from the village to the **hilltop site**, where ruins are scattered across two horns of high ground which seem to reach out to enclose the Gulf of Kissámou. Originally an eighth-century BC Dorian colony occupied by settlers from the Peloponnese, Polyrínia – a name meaning "rich in lambs" – remained a prosperous city down to Roman times and beyond. One of its main claims to fame, however, would not endear it to most Cretans: an inscription found here and dated to 69 BC tells of how the Polyrinians created a statue in honour of the Roman conqueror of Crete, Quintus Metellus, referring to him as the "saviour and benefactor of the city". It seems that Polyrínia did not join in the resistance put up by Haniá and other cities to the Roman invasion, and as a result was spared destruction.

The most obvious feature when you reach the site is the **Acropolis** (stunning **views** of the coast from the top) reached via a circuitous track starting east of the church. The acropolis site, much of which is in fact a Venetian defensive structure, is dotted with various ancient remains including some Roman **cisterns** and the vestiges of an **aqueduct**. Miscellaneous Roman and Greek masonry is incorporated into the **church** that now stands near the entrance to the site. The church is itself constructed on the base of what must have been an enormously impressive Hellenistic building, possibly a fourth-century BC temple. The sheer amount of work involved in cutting and dressing these stone blocks and transporting them to places as inaccessible as this makes you wonder at the phenomenal scale of manpower at the service of these towns in antiquity. The unsightly breeze blocks used for the cemetery wall of the modern church make a starkly ironic contrast. Slightly west of the church are the remains of some Hellenistic **dwellings** with cisterns and cave-like storage cellars.

The *Acropolis* taverna at the foot of the hill close to the site, and the pleasant *Taverna Polyrinia* in the village of **Áno Paleókastro** – with views almost as good as those from the top – both serve good **food**.

The northwest coast

Leaving Kastélli Kissámou for the west, the road climbs back into the hills again, cutting south across the base of the Gramvoúsa peninsula. Along this first stretch there are plenty of signs of development, with new apartment blocks and small hotels. One of the most attractive of these is the *Balos Beach Hotel* (ⓣ28220 24106, ⓦwww.balosbeach.gr; ⑦), in an isolated spot (signed from the main road) above the sea at the bottom of the peninsula, with bar, restaurant, pool, children's pool, and fabulous views back towards Kastélli and over a shipwreck on the beach. Apartment-style rooms have kitchen, air-conditioning and bathroom. Also worth trying are the *Olive Tree Apartments* (ⓣ28220 24376, ⑤; info at *To Kelari* taverna in Kastélli) with apartments ranged around a pool in the village of **Kalivianí** nearby, where you'll also find a couple of tavernas.

Gramvoúsa and its islands

Kalivianí is also the start of a track up the **Gramvoúsa peninsula** towards **Cape Voúxa** and the island of Gramvoúsa. This is just about driveable – plenty of locals do so anyway, though be warned that if you join them and damage the underside of a hire car, it won't be insured (four-wheel-drive recommended). The track starts at the end of the tarmac beyond Kalivianí – the *Kafenion Siponitakis* here makes a good final pit stop – heading steeply down past a church. It continues up the eastern side of the peninsula for some 9km, ending at a car park where there's a seasonal drinks stall. From here a well-marked path leads across to west-facing **Balos Bay**, ten minutes' walk or so, where there's a really spectacular white-sand **beach** (sadly with a bad tar problem) more or less opposite Gramvoúsa island. You can also walk the track from Kalivianí (in around three hours); either way, it's worth setting out early to avoid the crowds who arrive on boat trips from Kastélli (they usually arrive early afternoon). If you got a taxi to Kalivianí, you could walk up and get the boat back to Kastélli – it leaves around 4pm. **Walking** here is great – the peninsula is extraordinarily barren and quite unpopulated – but lonely, so take plenty of water and all the other provisions you're going to need, as apart from the car park stall and a spring near the chapel of Ayía Iríni, about 6km out (neither of which it's safe to rely on), there's nothing to be had beyond Kalivianí.

The easy way to do this, of course, is on an organized **boat trip** from Kastélli (p.372), which will take you to Balos Bay via the island of **Gramvoúsa**, on which the Venetians built an important castle. Along with the fortified islands of Néa Sóudha and Spinalónga, this was one of the points that held out against the Turks long after the Cretan mainland had fallen. When the Venetians left, the fort was allowed to fall into disrepair until it was taken over by Greek refugees from other Turkish-occupied islands (notably Kásos) who used it as a base for piracy. It took a major Turkish campaign to wrest the fortress back, and thereafter they maintained a garrison here. In the War of Independence it became a base for the Turkish ships attempting to maintain a blockade of the coastline. Today you can climb up to the fort, with lovely wildflowers in season, and enjoy a small beach, though this can become very crowded if the boat is full. Another slightly larger and wilder island, Agría Gramvoúsa, lies to the north just off the cape.

Falásarna

To reach the beautiful beach at **FALÁSARNA**, continue across the base of the peninsula and turn off at Plátanos: two buses a day direct from Haniá follow this route. The descent to the coast from Plátanos is via a spectacular series of hairpin bends above a narrow coastal plain, where farmers have discovered the benefits of plastic greenhouses for forcing tomatoes, melons and the like. Below, you can see two main beaches (with several smaller patches of sand between) – the southern one is much bigger, but the best sand is reached by continuing to the end of the asphalt, where there's a car park, the bus stop and a couple of taverna/rooms places above a broad crescent of yellow sand lapped by turquoise waters. Head down to the sand here, or walk a bit further north, past *Jimmy's* makeshift bar, to "Freedom". Although the beach can occasionally be afflicted by washed-up oil, tar and discarded rubbish, this doesn't detract from the overall beauty of the place. If it gets too crowded (and on Sundays in summer it will, as half of Haniá seems to head here) there are other patches of sand within easy walking distance in either direction.

Practicalities

There are an increasing number of **rooms** places scattered along the road behind Falásarna, many of them very comfortable. *Sunset* (ⓣ28220 41204; ③, four-person bungalow ⑤), right by the car park, has an enviable location and a good taverna, though its rooms (en-suite, with balcony) could do with modernization. The *Falasarna Beach Hotel* (ⓣ28220 41257; ③, four-person apartments ④), immediately behind, is a definite cut above, with studios with kitchenette and balcony sea views as well as apartments. On the way here you'll have passed many others. Newest and fanciest is the rather sterile Greek-German–run *Hotel Plakures* (ⓣ28220 41581, ⓦwww.plakures.de; ⑦ with breakfast) where well-appointed balcony rooms come with minibar but lack TV; public facilities include pool, bar, restaurant. Immediately behind, *Golden Sun* (ⓣ28220 41485; ②–③) has friendly proprietors, balcony rooms with bath (some air-conditioned with kitchenette) and a shady garden and the neighbouring and welcoming *Pension Stathis & Anastasia* (ⓣ28220 41480; ②–③) with similar facilities is also worth a try. *Kalami* (ⓣ28220 41461; ②), nearby, has similar air-conditioned en-suite rooms above a sea-front taverna. Finally, *Hotel Panorama* (ⓣ28220 41336; ③) lies on the way down to the bigger, southern beach, with comfortable air-conditioned balcony rooms above an excellent taverna with panoramic views. Quite a few people also **camp** at the back of the beach, either in a couple of small caves or beneath makeshift shelters slung between a few stumpy trees; if you decide to join them, take your rubbish away with you.

To **eat**, the rooms places named above are as good as any – all simple, and somewhat overwhelmed on busy weekends. The *Mouraki* taverna in Plátanos, right at the top of the road before it heads down to Falásarna, with spectacular views, is highly recommended if you can face the journey. *Jimmy's* bar, signed from the car park, is an excellent spot for a sunset cocktail, and there's also a lively seasonal beach bar on the southern beach. As for other facilities, there's an excellent, if rather pricey **minimarket** – with all the necessities and more – on the road by the junction to the southern beach. A couple of slightly bigger supermarkets can be found in Plátanos, where there's also a **bank** with an ATM.

Ancient Falásarna

The **ancient city** and port of Falásarna lies just to the north of the last beach. Follow the main dirt track for 1km beyond the car park, through the olive groves, and at the edge of the archeological site you will pass the large stone "**throne**" that has puzzled experts for a century – there is still no satisfactory explanation for its function.

The westernmost of the cities of ancient Crete, and now undergoing systematic excavation, Falásarna was founded prior to the sixth century BC and remained the sworn enemy of nearby Polyrínia (see p.375). What you are now able to see are the scattered remains of a city built around a large depression – its inner **harbour**

– and the bed of a canal that once joined this to the sea. The entire site is now high and dry, offering conclusive proof that Crete's western extremities have risen at least eight metres over the last 24 centuries or so. The excavators discovered large stone blocks thrown across the entrance to the old harbour; current thinking suggests that this was carried out in the first century BC by the Romans to prevent ships using the port as the base for a "pirates' nest". The harbour was defended by part of the city wall linked by a number of towers to a harbour mole, with the **South Tower**, the nearest to the sea, a formidable bastion built of huge sandstone blocks. More ruined structures are to be seen ascending the acropolis hill behind, and near to the chapel of Áyios Yeóryios a recently excavated building (beneath a canopy) revealed a number of well-preserved **terracotta baths**.

Continue on the best of the tracks past the site and you pass under Cyclopean walls to emerge above another small bay. Tempting as it is, this is too sharp and rocky to be able to get to the sea, but it does give you views to the north, over Cape Voúxa, which are shielded from Falásarna itself. Towards the top you can see the island of Gramvoúsa (not to be confused with the uninhabitable rock of Pontikonísi, a more distant islet which can sometimes be seen from the beach at Falásarna). It's possible to hike on from here up the **western side of the peninsula**, on an occasionally scary path above the coast, marked by blue paint and cairns. After about four and a half hours you reach a crest, the highest point on the walk, with breathtaking views over the islands. If you do try this, don't do it alone and take plenty of water.

Routes to the southwest

There are two routes **south of Kastélli Kissámou** to the southwest corner of the island. The more usual route runs inland, turning off the north-coast highway at Kaloudhianá, before Kastélli. This is a lovely rural drive up the valley of the Tiflós, and follows a reasonably good road as far as Váthi. In the sturdy farming villages of this unusually green part of Crete there are plenty of opportunities to take in the local wildlife, or to do some walking in the oleander- and chestnut-wooded hills and along numerous gorges. Alternatively, the **coast road** southwest of Plátanos, although lacking greenery, is spectacularly scenic, eventually looping round to join the inland route so that you can make this a circular drive. If you turn off the loop to continue south through Váthi, you'll end up at the romantically sited monastery of **Hrissokalítissa**, and beyond that the idyllic beaches of **Elafonísi**.

The inland route via Koutsamatádos

The area south of Kastélli between Topólia in the northeast and Váthi to the southwest includes some of the most fertile lands on the island. Here, lush **woodland** watered by tumbling streams emanating from the mountains is a haven for a rich variety of flora and fauna. Water is so plentiful around places such as Élos and Kefáli, in fact, that tourism comes a very poor second to agriculture. Everyone it seems has a *kípos* (smallholding), with a couple of dozen olive trees or a vegetable patch. The life of these villages is dictated by the needs of the farmers, a hardworking and laconic bunch who dress in sturdy boots and lumberjack shirts and greet one another with gruff cries of *"yia!"* (abbreviated from *yia sou*) from the open windows of Japanese pick-up trucks – the ultimate status symbol around these parts, as only bona fide farmers owning above a certain hectarage get a government subsidy to buy one.

Voulgháro, Topólia and Koutsamatádos

After some 4km of ascent you reach the village of **Voulgháro**, where you could stretch your legs in search of two ancient **churches**, Áyios Yeóryios and Áyios Nikólaos – the latter with fine frescoes – in the satellite villages of **Mákronas** across the valley and **Mourí** along a track 2km further south, respectively. When you reach Mourí, the church lies up a track (signed "Áyios Nikólaos" in Greek) 30m beyond the Venetian church to the right of the road as you come in from the south. Follow this for 500m up a rough track to reach another sign indicating the tiny chapel tucked away in an olive grove to the right. The impressive **fresco fragments**, especially those of Áyios Pandeleímon and the scenes from the Bible, are extremely fine. Just south of Mourí you could also descend into the ravine, making for the village of Koutsamatádos, a **walk** of about 5km. This walk is described in reverse in *Landscapes of Western Crete* (see p.462).

By road you'll continue climbing to **Topólia**, 3km after Voulgháro, whose church of Ayía Paraskeví has more **frescoes**, this time from the late Byzantine period. The direct route south from Topólia, however, soon enters a tunnel before skirting the edge of the dramatic **Koutsamatádos ravine**, one of the most imposing on the island. Nearing the middle of the ravine you'll come to a signed stairway cut into the rock on the right, and a muscle-taxing short climb to the **cave of Ayía Sofía**. This is one of the largest caves on Crete and remains found here date its usage back to Neolithic times; it now shelters a small chapel, along with stalactites, stalagmites and its present residents, a colony of bats. Keep an eye out also for vultures who are known to nest in the surrounding cliffs.

Proceeding along the ravine, you will soon reach the hamlet of **Koutsamatádos** where the roadside *Rooms Taverna Panorama* (☎28220 51163; ②) is a possible stopping-place for a meal (excellent *hórta* from its own *kípos*), coffee and cakes, or even air-conditioned en-suite **rooms** with a terrace view, should you decide on a more detailed exploration of the area. The friendly proprietor Manolis Motakis and his Dutch wife Antonia are keen to put up walkers, and can advise on various local hiking routes, including the climb of **Koproula**, the highest peak hereabouts. Less ambitiously, many of the easier local walks have been signed from the taverna: there is a ten-minute path from here to the Ayía Sofía cave, for example, as well as a path to Miliá (see below), about an hour's climb.

Miliá and the eastern Enneachora

Three kilometres south of Koutsomatádos you enter an area known as the **Enneachora** – the "Nine Villages". Here – with your own transport – you can turn off (look for the sign to Miliá) to follow a beautifully scenic drive through the leafy hills and farming villages on the western flank of the Tiflós valley.

The first village you come to is **Vlátos**, where a sign on the left indicates a turning to the *Platania* **taverna**. A path through woods leads to the taverna's terrace, close to the gigantic thousand-year-old **plane tree** that gives the place its name. It's a friendly hideaway that serves up good meat and *mezédhes* to the passing trade, but makes its money from mammoth wedding feasts. Near the foot of the road to Miliá (see below) lies *To Metóhi Monahoyou* (☎6948227166; ③ with breakfast), an olive farm whose organic oil is on sale in a small shop near the entrance. The friendly proprietors, mother and daughter, also offer pleasant rooms in a stone-built house, prepare vegetarian meals and can advise on walks in the area.

Beyond here, a road is signed to **Miliá**, a remarkable "eco-tourist" village. The precipitous track, only the first half of which is surfaced, climbs dizzily along the shoulder of Mount Kefáli for 5km offering magnificent **views** over the chestnut- and olive-clad valley below. This arrives at a car park, from where a path leads into a stunningly picturesque hamlet of stone houses, once occupied by farmers and shepherds. The isolation of the village eventually led to its abandonment around a century ago until, in the early 1980s, a relative of a former inhabitant proposed to restore the whole place as a working village, welcoming visitors. Other families who owned ruined houses joined in and a co-operative was formed, backed by EU money. Stonemasons skilled in building traditional dwellings were brought over from the Peloponnese and helped to re-create what you now see: an almost too perfect village with solid stone houses on many levels overlooking a verdant cleft brimming with chestnuts, oaks, planes and olives.

You should soon locate one house which now serves as the community centre and **bar/taverna** (open daily) offering organic food and vegetables produced on the village's land, as well as freshly baked bread. Visitors are welcome to become involved in the ongoing farming activities including planting and sowing as well as chestnut, olive and apple harvesting (Miliá means "apple tree" in Greek); you can even help in making *raki* at the village's own still. Otherwise you can **walk** in the nearby hills – the easier paths are signed – or simply contemplate the natural surroundings; the nights up here are truly magical. The rustically furnished **rooms** vary in size from small "semi-detached" en-suite cottages (⑤ with breakfast) to houses for four (⑦), but all are delightful and contain appropriate rustic furnishings and ancient fittings such as huge fireplaces (wood provided in winter) and stone ovens. There's hot water and a small bathroom light powered from solar panels, wind generation (and wood fires in winter) but no mains electricity. Candles are provided in the rooms and these also illuminate the restaurant in the evening. There are positively no telecommunications, save one mobile-phone link with the outside world. To stay, you can simply turn up, but it's wise to ring ahead to make a reservation (☎28220 51569 or ☎6945753743). This kind of imaginative enterprise is perhaps a pointer to the future for the development of tourism on the island.

Back in Vlátos, the road continues through the simple villages of Rogdiá and Límni, each with its own bar but little else, until it rejoins the direct road just before Pervólia.

Élos and Perivólia

The direct route from Koutsamatádos tracks the lower slopes of the Tiflós valley and, shortly after the turn-off to Vlátos, a turning on the left heads southwest through Aligí and Dris to meet the Paleohóra road at the village of **Plemenianá**. Three kilometres down here an alternative route, recently asphalted, forks south through some lonely, if spectacular, mountain country via Arhondikó and **Voutás** (see p.384) to approach Paleohóra from the west. Along the way scores of little streams cascade beside, under, or sometimes across, the road. You'll find hardly any traffic passes on either route, and the rare villages are ancient and rustic; their inhabitants stand and stare as you drive through, but are extremely welcoming if you stop.

The road from Koutsamatádos continues southwest past slopes covered with magnificent stands of chestnut, plane and other deciduous trees. Chestnuts, in fact, are a major local crop around here and **Élos**, 4km along, is the centre of the Enneachora **chestnut-growing** region. Élos is beautiful and, even at the height of summer, a wonderfully refreshing place. It's easy to forget just how high you are here – the mountains to the south rise to about 1200m. In the village's square, shaded by plane, eucalyptus and, of course, chestnut trees, *Rooms Kastanofolia* ("Chestnut Den"; ☎28220 61258; ②) is a clean and simple place with **rooms** (some en-suite) above a good **taverna**. There are ducks in a pool filled by a stream running beside the taverna's terrace and, directly opposite over the road, you can stroll along a track that leads a couple of kilometres into the chestnut forests. Behind the taverna

△ Miliá “eco- tourist” mountiain village there is also an impressive old arch, claimed to be a Roman aqueduct (though perhaps more likely Turkish), and just beyond this lies a fourteenth-century **Byzantine chapel**, with fresco fragments including an impressive *Pantokrátor* in the apse; if closed, the key should be available from the taverna. Throughout the village, ancient stonework has been replaced and repaired, and old paths restored – clearly the locals take justifiable pride in their surroundings. The great event in Élos's year is the annual **chestnut festival** in late October.

Five kilometres further, a turn on the left indicates a sharp descent to the picturesque hamlet of **Perivólia**, tucked into the folds of a high gorge beneath the northern flank of Mount Áyios Díkeos Ióv (Job the Just). The village is another verdant oasis with charming narrow streets punctuated by simple white-walled dwellings and smallholdings overflowing with vigorously sprouting vegetables. Park any transport where you cross a bridge at the foot of the descent and, turning right, continue on foot to the bottom of the village and a fountain, near a recently erected bust to one of the noted local *pallikári* (guerrilla fighters) of the last century, Anagnostis Skalidis. At the house opposite you will find a small **museum** (10am–1pm & 5–8pm; €1) assembled by one of his descendants, Zacharia Skalidis. An amiable man who speaks only Greek, he will be delighted to show you around his collection, which includes lots of atmospheric photos from a Crete long gone, as well as old guns, letters and coins.

Kefáli and Váthi

Barely 2km beyond Pervólia, another charming Enneachora village, **Kefáli**, has a fine fourteenth-century frescoed **church**, Metamórphosis tou Sotirís (Transfiguration of Christ), down a track on the left as you enter the village; follow the path downhill turning right, then left and right again before making a final left up an alley opposite a renovated white stone house to reach the church. Inside, the fine **frescoes** depict the betrayal by Judas (whose face has been gouged) and the lowering of Christ from the cross. There is also some interesting and apparently genuine early graffiti, scratched across the paintings. An Englishman, Francis Lerfordes, has marked his contribution with the date 1553, while Turks later inscribed their blasphemous thoughts along with the crescent symbol – to the further detriment of the artworks. The main street has **rooms** with and without bath above *Taverna Polakis* (☎28220 61260; ②), with a splendid balcony view over the Bay of Stomíou. The proprietors can also direct you to the church should you encounter difficulties. The aptly named *Panorama* taverna, opposite, provides meals with a view.

Váthi, 1km south of Kefáli, is another of the Enneachora villages and has two more ancient frescoed **churches** for enthusiasts: the thirteenth-century Áyios Yeóryios off the central square, and the century-older Mihaíl Arhángelos, just to the south. To reach the former take a track uphill facing the plane tree in the central *platía* to the left of a drinking fountain. Follow the track uphill for 200m, where it turns into a narrow *kalderími* (ancient footpath) which leads you to the church; it should be open. Inside, the frescoes are in good condition, with a sensitive portrayal of the Archangel Gabriel and an unusual image of the Virgin and child in the apse, in place of the conventional *Pantokrátor*. To see the church of Mihaíl Arhángelos you'll need to locate the village priest, who has the key; try at the *kafenío* near the plane tree. He will conduct you to the south of the village, soon taking a left across fields to the church. Inside are wonderfully preserved early fourteenth-century **frescoes** depicting the Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, the Fall of Jericho, Christ entering Jerusalem, and a moving portrayal of the betrayal by Judas. For his trouble, a contribution to church funds will be gratefully accepted by the *papás*.

The coast road

If you were to carry straight on in Kefáli, instead of turning off to Váthi, you'd be on the **coast road** running back around to Plátanos. Just out of Kefáli magnificent coastal **views** begin to unfold, with the distant beaches of Elafonísi shimmering mirage-like in a turquoise sea. Around you, olives ripen on the terraced hillsides and the villages seem to cling desperately to the high mountainsides, as if miraculously saved from some calamitous slide to the sea, glittering far below.

By **Kámbos**, 14km from Kefáli, you've descended enough for there to be a **beach** accessible below the village, albeit an hour's hike down a superb gorge inhabited by colonies of doves. The path, marked by yellow and blue dots, sets off from the church by the village square: alternatively there's a steep but driveable track down, apshalted until the last 100m or so. Almost at the bottom you pass the *Hotel Agia Fisi*, with a couple of basic rooms (②) and a couple of fancier studios with kitchen (④) – pricey for what you get, but offering total isolation. Isolation is the main attraction of the beach too, which, close up, is rather stony. Up on the main road here there's also **accommodation** and **food** available at the rural *Rooms Hartzulakis* (Ⓣ28220 41445; ②). On the wall here a map details walking trails around this coast, outlining a four-stage route from Kastélli to Paleohóra which avoids the roads followed by the E4.

Sfinári, a tortuous 7km north of Kámbos and slightly inland, is more developed and its quiet pebble beach is somewhat spoiled by greenhouses and derelict buildings a bit too close to the water for comfort. It is, however, a very friendly place, with plenty of rooms and places to eat both on the road and on the way down to the beach. The southern end of the strand is marginally less cluttered and here a cluster of **tavernas** gather beneath shady tamarisks: they positively encourage camping on the beach, and most provide loungers for customers. Among them, *Captain Fidias* and *Taverna Dilini* are both worth a try.

Beyond Sfinári the route climbs again and there are some terrific **views** from high above the coast as it twists and turns for 10km to cross the shoulder of Mount Manna, before dropping towards Plátanos and the turning for Falásarna (p.376). After this it's an easy descent to the coast and the Gulf of Kissámou and the main road into Kastélli Kissámou.

Hrissoskalítissa

Hrissoskalítissa lies some ten uneventful kilometres southwest of Váthi. There are a couple of tavernas and rooms places on the way down here – *Glykeria* (Ⓣ & Ⓕ28220 61292; ④) with a pool is good if pricey – but otherwise little beyond the weathered, white-walled **monastery** (now, in fact, a nunnery; daily 8am–8pm; €2 "for the museum, not the church"; Orthodox faith free) of the Virgin of the Golden Step, beautifully sited on a rocky promontory above the sea. Today barely functioning, it has reduced from some two hundred residents to a solitary nun and one monk, whose main task seems to be keeping the place acceptable for tourists. The present church – containing a much-venerated thousand-year-old icon of the Virgin – dates only from the last century, but the monastery building is an ancient foundation: the first church was built in a cave here in the thirteenth century and recent investigations have turned up evidence of a much earlier Minoan settlement (or shrine) as well. A recently added **museum** has a few icons and much uninteresting religious paraphernalia. Look out for the ninety steps that lead to the top of the crag around which the place is built: one of them appears golden (*hrissí skála*) to those who are pure in spirit – a fact which the authors are unable to verify.

Elafonísi

For **Elafonísi** you've another 5km of asphalt to traverse. This almost tropical lagoon of white sand tinged pink by shells, aquamarine waters, salt-encrusted rock pools and bright red starfish is still, despite increasing exploitation, as idyllic a spot as any in Crete. The water is incredibly warm, calm and shallow and Elafonísi – actually an island just offshore – is a short wade across the sandbar. There are more beaches on its far side (with waves), along with the odd ruined wall, seashells and a monument to Australian sailors shipwrecked here in 1907.

Not surprisingly, all this has not gone undiscovered, and there are now two **boats** a day from Paleohóra, a daily **bus** from Haniá and Réthimnon and at least one bus tour as well as scores of day-trippers who often fill an improvised car-parking space to bursting. The arrival of the crowds has brought lines of sun umbrellas and loungers to the beach, but little else in the way of infrastructure: by the entry to the car park (where buses stop) are a couple of *kantinas* and a kiosk/shop; there's a further *kantina* on the beach and there are also portable toilets and an incongruous **phone** box.

The area has also been declared a National Park, though this seems to have little practical effect other than ensuring that no permanent structures can be constructed nearer than 1km to the shore. The only **accommodation** is thus set well back, along the approach road. *Rooms Elafonisi* (☎28220 61274; ②–③) is probably the best choice, with its own **taverna** and **minimarket**, and air-conditioned balcony rooms; *Panorama*, just below, also has a good taverna with better views, but the rooms here are less good.

Walks from Elafonísi

Continuing south from Elafonísi the E4 **coastal path** to Paleohóra (about 17km away) is reasonably well marked, but it's still a tough walk, especially in the early stages (see p.392), with one hair-raising section above a sheer drop near the hill of Ktista, which is definitely not for the faint-hearted. Check the route before you set out, and don't venture this way alone, or without plentiful water. This route is described (in reverse) in Alan Hall's *Western Crete* (see Books, p.462).

You could also hike up a track heading inland to **Sklavopoúla** (7km away; see p.393) and its satellite hamlets. The tracks to reach Sklavoupoúla are clearly marked on the Petrákis *Haniá Trekking and Road Map* and also on the Harms-Verlag map (see p.65). By continuing east through Kalamiós, you'll reach the main surfaced road at **Voutás**, eight kilometres further, where you may be able to pick up a lift to Paleohóra, 13km on.

The south and Sélinos region

The direct route from the north coast to **Paleohóra** is a well-surfaced road that takes the line of least resistance across the mountains: consequently it feels a great deal less intimidating than the routes to either side. However, the scenery is always enjoyable with dramatic vistas, plenty of greenery and the advantage of numerous villages along the way, meaning that you're never far from a place to stop for a drink or a bite to eat. From the turning at Tavronítis, the road traces a long valley fingering its way beneath the hills as far as Voukoliés, a large village with a crowded Saturday-morning market (all over by about 10am). Hereafter you begin to climb in earnest, through several much smaller villages, towards the eparchy (province) of Sélinos, stretching roughly from the village of Flória to the south coast.

For **Soúyia**, the most direct road from the north coast leaves Haniá along the road to Omalós. Branching off at Alikianós, it follows the valleys through the western foothills of the White Mountains, passing the Ayía Iríni Gorge and a string of Sélinos villages before sweeping down the Herokténa valley into Soúyia.

Despite its isolation from the north and centre of the island, **Sélinos** has played a significant role in the island's history since ancient times. As early as the third century BC several of the communities here were important enough to form a confederation with Górtys (see p.138) and Magus, king of Cyrenaica, in Libya. Under the Romans, cities such as Lissós, Elyrós and Syia (modern Sóuyia) prospered greatly. This distinguished past laid the foundations for the communal pride which created the scores of **Byzantine churches** here, perhaps the main reason to visit Sélinos today. Every village seems to offer at least one example, while some have as many as three or more.

Flória to Paleohóra

Flória, almost exactly halfway across the island, is divided into two halves: Káto (lower) Flória, straddling the road, and Apáno (upper) Flório above it. The upper village has the church of Áyii Patéres (the Holy Fathers), although here only fresco fragments remain. In the lower village, **Áyios Yeóryios** preserves thirteen panels of fine fifteenth-century frescoes. To reach it, go down a lane to the right of the second taverna you pass on the right. After about 600m you'll come to a small footbridge over a dry streambed; cross this and after 50m veer left at a fork to follow the path leading to the church. Near to the first taverna (the better of the pair), two war memorials – one German, one Greek – face each other across the road, serving as grim reminders of the terrible atrocities that happened here during World War II when, locals will tell you, they saw their parents and relatives gunned down in the self-same road.

Kándanos and Anisiráki

Kándanos, approached along a verdant valley planted with olives, is the chief village of Sélinos (though it's a great deal smaller than Paleohóra), and makes a pleasant, quiet place to stop for a coffee or even a meal. Despite an ancient name that goes back to Dorian times and the existence of as many as fifteen Byzantine **churches** in the vicinity (it was the see of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine period and the see of the Roman Church under the Venetians), the village buildings are almost entirely new, for the place was razed to the ground by the Germans for its role in the **wartime resistance**. In 1941, after the German army had taken Máleme (see p.336), troops were dispatched urgently along this road to prevent the Allies landing reinforcements at Paleohóra. The resistance fighters of Kándanos determined to stop them, and despite a ferocious pitched battle the Germans could not break through for two crucial days; their progress was frustrated by the Cretans who also shot a number of German soldiers in the action. In retribution the Germans utterly destroyed the village and a sign was erected on the spot. The original sign is today preserved on a war memorial in the square – in German and Greek it reads: "Here stood Kándanos, destroyed in retribution for the murder of 25 German soldiers, and never to be rebuilt again."

The village that arose defiantly from the ashes is a pleasantly easy-going place today with a quartet of Byzantine **churches**. The first, Mihaíl Arhángelos, signed to the left up a lane on the northern edge of the village, has good but damaged frescoes in a restored church. The second, Áyios Mámas, has more damaged frescoes in a charming small white chapel; it's signed down a road by the petrol station on the village's main road junction, and lies 1km along here through olive groves. The third church, Ayía Ekateríni, is signed off the main street near the central *platía* and is a beautiful old building with faded fresco fragments. The best of all though is **Áyios Ioánnis**, signed downhill off the Paleohóra road on the edge of the village. It lies 1km from the road, where another small white church contains superb fresco fragments.

Kándanos has opened up to the tourist trade in recent times and there are now a couple of **tavernas** and the odd café on the central *platía* close to the war memorial. On the outskirts is a waterworks, given to the village by the Germans after the war as an act of reconciliation, and many of the German military who served here have since returned to the village to forge friendships with their erstwhile adversaries.

A short detour from Kándanos east leads up to **Anisaráki**, where you'll find more fine frescoes in the fifteenth-century churches of Ayía Ánna (signed on the left in an olive grove as you enter) with a rare stone iconostasis, Panayía and Ayía Paraskeví (both signed from the centre). Nearby, in the hamlet of **Koufalotós**, halfway between Kándanos and Anisaráki, the chapel of **Áyios Mihaíl Arhángelos** has fourteenth-century paintings by the Cretan master Ioánnis Pagoménos (see p.393). The chapel is located down a track on the right (coming from Anisaráki), and across a stream.

Plemenianá, Kakodhíki and Kádhros

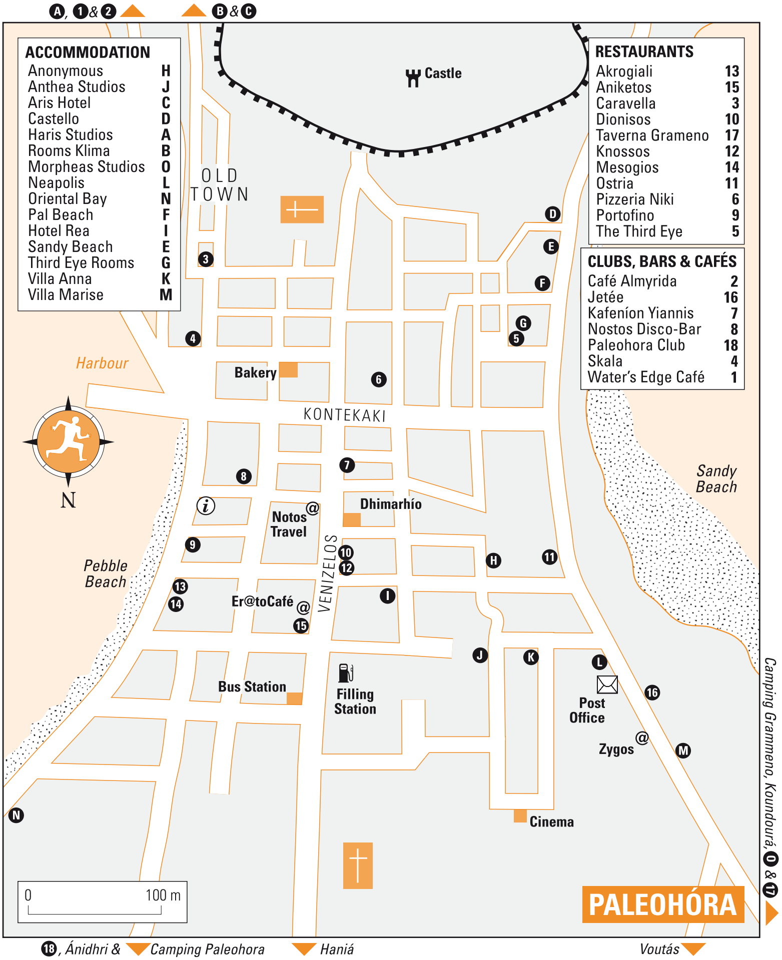
Beyond Kándanos the next few villages on or close to the main road are also worth a look and all have frescoed churches: Áyios Yeóryios in **Plemenianá** has paintings dating from the fifteenth century, while **Kakodhíki**, known for its curative springs, has several churches nearby. These include the very ancient chapel of **Mihaíl Arhángelos**, probably early thirteenth-century, beside the modern church of Ayía Triádha, and the hilltop Áyios Isidhóros, with magnificent views and frescoes defaced by the Turks. Just off the road to the left **Kádhros**, some 9km from Kándanos, has the churches of Ioánnis Chrysóstomos and the **Panayía** (reached via a downhill path beside a gaily decorated *kafenío*; key from the house near the church), whose fine frescoes are almost complete. Many more small churches can be found throughout the area, particularly if you get off the road into the smaller villages. Few, if any, of them will be open when you arrive – but express an interest at the nearest *kafenío* or to a local passer-by and it rarely takes long to hunt out the priest or someone else with a key.

South of Kakodhíki, the road tracks the Kakodikianós valley for 10km, before crossing to the river's west bank for the approach to Paleohóra.

Paleohóra

PALEOHÓRA was known originally as Kastél Selínou – the castle of Sélinos – and for much of its history was no more than that, a castle. Built by the Venetians in 1279, the fort was destroyed by Barbarossa in 1539 and never properly reconstructed even when the small port grew up beneath it. The ruins are still perched at the bulbous end of the headland now occupied by the settlement of Paleohóra – at its narrowest a bare four blocks across from the harbour on one side to the beach on the other.

The village is rapidly growing into a small town, and its facilities can barely cope with the increasing volume of visitors. Even so, the place has a remarkable ability to retain its enjoyably laid-back, end-of-the-line feel, helped no doubt by superb and extensive sands. Warm right through the winter, this out-of-season backwater makes an excellent place to rent an inexpensive apartment long-term.


A, 1 & 2
B & C
ACCOMMODATION
Anonymous H
Anthea Studios J
Aris Hotel C
Castello D
Haris Studios A
Rooms Klima B
Morpheas Studios O
Neapolis L
Oriental Bay N
Pal Beach F
Hotel Rea I
Sandy Beach E
Third Eye Rooms G
Villa Anna K
Villa Marise M
Castle
RESTAURANTS
Akrogiali 13
Aniketos 15
Caravella 3
Dionisos 10
Taverna Grameno 17
Knossos 12
Mesogios 14
Ostria 11
Pizzeria Niki 6
Portofino 9
The Third Eye 5
CLUBS, BARS & CAFÉS
Café Almyrida 2
Jetée 16
Kafeníon Yiannis 7
Nostos Disco-Bar 8
Paleohora Club 18
Skala 4
Water's Edge Café 1
OLD TOWN
Harbour
Bakery
KONTEKAKI
N
Sandy Beach
Dhimarhío
Notos Travel
Pebble Beach
VENIZELOS
Er@toCafé
Bus Station
Filling Station
Post Office
Zygos
Cinema
Camping Grammeno, Koundourá, 0 & 17
0 100 m
PALEOHÓRA
18, Ánidhri & Camping Paleohora
Haniá
Voutás

Arrival and information

The main road from Kándanos leads you into a eucalyptus-lined avenue that becomes Paleohóra's single main street, Venizélos, lined with taverna after café after bar. The **bus** will drop you at the northern end of the street. If you come from the west, on the roads via Voutás or Sarakína, you'll emerge on the road behind the sandy western beach, by the post office. Although not particularly attractive by day, **Venizélos** is the vibrant soul of the village, and on summer evenings it is closed to traffic, brightly illuminated and filled to overflowing as the bar and restaurant tables spill across the pavement and encroach onto the road. From the main street, nothing is further than a five-minute walk away, and you have a choice of heading south towards the castle and yacht marina, east to aptly named "Pebble Beach" or west to, not surprisingly, "Sandy Beach".

The helpful municipal **tourist office** (May–Oct daily except Tues 10am–1pm & 6–9pm; ☎ 28230 41507) in a cabin fronting Pebble Beach can give you a copy

△ Paleohora beach

of their town map and advise about likely rooms places, as well as apartment lets, should you be interested in a longer sojourn.

There are **travel agents** all around town: Notos Travel (☎28230 42110), on Venizélos opposite the town hall, has a finger in every pie, with a launderette (€8 for a full wash and dry) and expensive Internet access as well as exchange, **car, motorbike** and **mountain bike** (€3 per day) **hire**, tours and more. Sabine Travel, virtually next door, also has trips, exchange, and cars, motorbikes and mountain bikes for hire (☎28230 42105). Two agencies on Kontekáki just up from the harbour – E-Motion (ⓣ28230 41755) and Selino Travel (ⓣ28230 42272) – are a little less frenetic, and also offer local boat-trips including **dolphin-spotting** cruises (these don't seem to have a very high success rate). Any of these can sell you tickets for the local **ferries** – in season (May to mid-Oct) the main services are to Elafonísi (daily at 10am, returning at 4pm), Gávdhos via Soúyia (Tues & Wed at 8.30am, returning same days at 3pm) and along the coast to Soúyia and Ayía Rouméli, where you can pick up an onward service to Loutró and Hóra Sfakíon (daily at 9.45am). Among the many day-trips offered by the travel agents are the **gorge walks** of **Samariá** (p.347) and **Ayía Iríni** (p.396). It's also perfectly possible to do these by public bus, with a daily service heading for Omalós via Ayía Iríni daily at 6am throughout the summer. You can then get the boat back from Ayía Rouméli or Soúyia in the late afternoon.

There's excellent **diving and snorkelling** on this coast, and Aquacreta on Kontekáki (ⓣ28230 41393, ⓦwww.aquacreta.gr) is a highly professional PADI dive school organizing trips mainly to the west (they have a dive centre on a nearby beach) but also out to Gávdhos. An introductory half-day course with dive costs around €50.

Internet access is available at several places including Notos Travel, *Er@to Café* further north on Venizélos, the *Zygos Café* near the post office, and *Water's Edge Café* at *Haris Studios* (see p.390). There are several **banks** (Mon–Fri 8am–2pm) with ATMs on Venizélos, just north of the town hall, and there are handy **cardphones** here as well as in numerous other locations. A well-stocked *períptero* on Venizélos sells **foreign newspapers**, also available at the To Delfini **bookshop** on Kontekáki; the latter also has a good selection of books in English including a book of **walks**, *Ten Walks Around Paleohóra* by Bob and Lynne Tait. The **post office** (Mon–Fri 7.30am–2pm) is out on the road behind Sandy Beach. There are several **pharmacies** on Kontekáki and Venizélos, and the town has four **petrol stations**; the one behind Sandy Beach has the longest hours. This is also where the biggest **supermarkets** are – Paleohóra has an extraordinary number of big supermarkets for such a small place, largely thanks to a long-running rivalry between two local family firms. There's a **taxi** office just by the harbour, or call ⓣ28320 83033.

Accommodation

Finding a **room** is unlikely to be a major problem outside August. Inexpensive places are mostly found in the backstreets away from the beach – particularly the street parallel to Pebble Beach and in the narrow streets towards the castle – but you'll see signs everywhere.

For **campsites**, *Camping Paleohora* (ⓣ28230 41120) lies 2km northeast of the centre, reached along the road running behind the pebble beach. Attractively sited in an olive grove close to the beach with plenty of shade, its only drawback is the bonehard terrain. Another pleasant site is the newer *Camping Grammeno* (ⓣ28230 42125), a similar distance out along the coast to the west; however, it's increasingly beset by development and plastic greenhouses, so check that it hasn't been engulfed before making the journey.

Anonymous In a backstreet behind the tourist office ⓣ28230 41509, ⓕ28230 42333. Among the least expensive places in town, and something of a travellers' meeting place. Simple but pleasant rooms with and without bath off a charming garden courtyard. Also has two studios (④) with kitchen. ①

Anthea Studios Inland from Sandy Beach ⓣ28230 41594, ⓦwww.anthea-paleohora.gr. Big, modern block with a variety of a/c rooms, studios and apartments, almost all with balcony and pleasant views inland. ②–③

Aris Hotel On the upper road at the south end of the peninsula, beneath the castle ⓣ28230 41502, ⓦwww.aris-hotel.gr. Charming and peaceful garden hotel. Pleasant en-suite a/c balcony rooms

(30 & 31 overlooking the garden are the ones to go for), most with sea view. Breakfast included. ⑤

Castello South end of Sandy Beach ⓣ28230 41143. Charming and good-value little place for rooms with bath and balcony in an elevated position overlooking the Sandy Beach; rooms at the back without view are less expensive (singles available too), and you can still get the views from the terrace taverna. ②

Haris Studios On the sea front below the east side of the castle ⓣ28230 42438, ⓦwww.paleochora-holidays.com. A friendly Cretan-Scottish–run place with a/c studios and apartments with balconies and sea views; the ones on the upper floors are better, but all are en-suite, with cooking facilities. ③

Rooms Klima Old town below the castle, above *Café Almyrida* ⓣ28230 41205, ⓔklima@yahoo.com. Simple a/c en-suite rooms with fridge in a well-run place with great views east along the coast. Also has a single; information in the café; includes breakfast. ③

Morpheas Studios 4km west of town on the road to Koundourá ⓣ28230 41697. Pleasant studios with balcony, fridge and kitchenette, in a tranquil garden setting close to the water. ③

Neapolis Sandy Beach by post office, behind *Café Neapolis* ⓣ28230 41134. Very pleasant, simple en-suite a/c rooms and apartments set back from the road. One huge apartment (⑦) at the front with two bedrooms and separate kitchen and bathroom. ②

Oriental Bay Behind taverna of same name at the northern end of Pebble Beach ⓣ28230 41076, ⓔorientalbay@mail.gr. Almost the last place on the beach, which ensures peace, and often means there's room when others are full. Plain but pleasant a/c en-suite balcony rooms with fridge; some triples. ②

Pal Beach Sandy Beach ⓣ28230 41512, ⓦwww.palbeach.gr. The town's priciest hotel is big and rather bland, but the a/c sea-view rooms fronting Sandy Beach are comfortable, and there are a couple of luxurious apartments. ⑤ with breakfast.

Hotel Rea Backstreet off Venizélos, behind the tourist office ⓣ28230 41307, ⓔapap@cha.forthnet.gr. Friendly, small hotel with a/c balcony rooms with fridge and TV, the best value and most pleasant of a group of small hotels here. It also has classy new apartments (⑤), for two or four people, with satellite TV. ④

Sandy Beach Hotel South end of Sandy Beach ⓣ28230 42138, ⓕ28230 42139. Relatively new hotel and competitor for the nearby *Pal Beach* (above) with a/c, sea-view, balcony-terrace rooms equipped with fridge and TV. ⑤ with breakfast.

Third Eye Rooms Behind the *Third Eye* restaurant ⓣ28230 41234, ⓦwww.thethirdeye-paleochora.info. Variety of en-suite rooms at various prices: some a/c, some fan-cooled; most with kitchenette. Also a couple of larger apartments. ①–③

Villa Anna In broad sidestreet off Sandy Beach near the post office ⓣ2810 346428 or 6944596860, ⓦwww.villaanna-paleochora.com. Pricey but very pleasant apartments for two to six people – large, nicely furnished, all with kitchen and a/c, and surrounded by lush gardens. Booking recommended. ⑤–⑥

Villa Europa On Sandy Beach north of the post office ⓣ28230 83018, ⓦwww.villamarise.com. Sea-front place with a variety of well-equipped, en-suite a/c balcony rooms, apartments and studios for up to six people (decent single rates too). Has own pool. ④

The Town

Other than head for the beach, eat and drink, there's not a great deal to see or do in Paleohóra, which of course is a major part of its attraction. If you want to be more active, there are plenty of trips on offer, as well as attractive **walks** inland, to charming villages like Ánidhri and Azoyirés (see p.392–4), or along the coast in either direction. In town you can check out the **castle**, for the views back over town, or walk right around the end of the promontory to return to the beach on the other side. Neither of these options is as appealing as it might be, since the fortress itself is little more than a hillock ringed with broken walls, while a new marina and some unsightly harbour buildings dominate the point. Heading up to the castle you'll see the oldest parts of town, to the south of the harbour.

Of the beaches, western **Sandy Beach** is more impressive: magnificently broad and sandy, lined with tamarisks and supplied with showers, on a bay with excellent easy windsurfing. **Pebble Beach**, facing east, is at first sight a much less attractive proposition. However, this eastern side is far livelier at night, when the beachfront promenade rivals the main street for action and choice of eating; the cafés and restaurants over here have a stunning evening view of the moon rising over the mountains. The beach is also much more sheltered when the wind is blowing, and if you venture far enough north, away from town, you'll even find some sand.

Eating, drinking and entertainment

There are plenty of **eating** places to choose from, and prices here are generally reasonable. The Pebble Beach restaurants tend to be the more touristy, though this does have the advantage that there are several places serving **breakfast**. There are plenty of **cafés** scattered around too, especially on Venizélos and around its junction with Kontekáki; a couple of lovely, tranquil spots in the old town with sea-view terraces for breakfast, coffees and drinks are the *Water's Edge Café* (see below) and *Café Almyrida*, in the street immediately behind it. There's takeaway *souvláki* and *yíros pitta* at *Aniketos*, on Venizélos half a block south of the bus station, and from a simple place near the harbour on Pebble Beach, squeezed between touristy *Captain Jim* and *Dino's Grill*. There are also a number of **bakeries** – probably the best is *Bakakis*, near the harbour behind the supermarket and opposite the *Anemos* bar.

Akrogiali Pebble Beach. Attractively old-fashioned taverna among the glossier places on Pebble Beach with good Greek standards.

Caravella Old town sea front just south of the ferry jetty ☎28230 41131. Paleohóra's best seafood restaurant, with a pleasant waterfront terrace. The cooking and service are excellent, as is their chilled *hyma* (barrelled wine from the Kastélli Kissámou area).

Dionisos Venizélos, near the town hall. Attractive place which is a bit fancier than the competition here – with prices to match.

Taverna Grameno Three kilometres west towards Koundourá along the coast road, fronting Grameno beach ☎28230 41505. Highly recommended place and perhaps the area's most authentic Cretan restaurant. It's a friendly garden taverna with a play area for kids, and the cooking is outstanding – take a look in the kitchen for what is seasonal and fresh.

Knossos Venizélos close to the National Bank. Decent place offering the usual taverna standards. Has a street terrace.

Kyma Pebble Beach. Big place serving decent taverna standards in a nice setting.

Mesogios Pebble Beach, about halfway along ☎28230 41167. Crete's only authentic Spanish restaurant was founded by a *valenciano* ex-seaman whose ship broke down here and who became enchanted with the place. Authentic Valencian *paellas* plus a variety of *tapas* and some interesting Spanish wines.

Oriental Bay At the northern end of Pebble Beach ☎28230 41322. With a pleasant tamarisk-shaded terrace fronting the sea, this is one of the nicest places in town for a meal, be it fish or meat (some vegetarian options), often with live (guitar) musical accompaniment; has a decent wine list and also serves excellent juices and breakfasts.

Ostria Sandy Beach. Large and friendly taverna serving well-cooked Greek staples. On Fridays there's a "Greek night", with music and dancing.

Pizzeria Niki Off the south side of Kontekáki. A pleasant courtyard setting for excellent pizzas cooked in a wood-fired oven.

Portofino Pebble Beach. Touristy place with an international menu, but also good pizzas from a wood-fired oven.

The Third Eye Inland from Sandy Beach ☎28230 41234. Excellent vegetarian restaurant (plus a few fish dishes) run by a Greek–New Zealand couple. Worth putting up with the often brusque service for excellent food and spices rarely seen on Crete, from curries to *gado-gado* and bean salads, as well as more conventional Greek dishes. The world music background sounds go well with the cuisine, and there are regular concerts of *lyra*, Greek and Asian music throughout the summer.

Water's Edge Café On the sea front below the east side of the castle ☎28320 42438. As well as having a lovely terrace for snacks and drinks, the *Water's Edge* serves dinner weekly on Saturday; freshly made and excellent. Booking recommended.

Drinking and entertainment

Paleohóra clings to its village origins and has no pretensions to be anything other than a tranquil seaside resort with family appeal: if you're looking for all-night discos and raucous bars you've come to the wrong place. Most bars keep their music volume well down after dark and even the liveliest part of town, the Pebble Beach promenade, is a pretty tame affair when compared to most other resorts on the island.

After a day at the beach, entertainment in Paleohóra is confined mainly to the **bars**. Many of the most popular of these are shoehorned into the Venizélos–Kontekáki junction and down towards the harbour, where *Ayios* and *Anemos* are popular meeting spots. There are more on Venizélos itself, as well as a couple of old-fashioned café/*ouzerí* serve good-value drinks: a popular choice is the central *Yiannis*, whose eponymous proprietor is one of the town's characters. The old town, sandwiched between the castle and the sea on the peninsula's east flank, makes for a pleasant evening stroll – here the *Café Almyrida* and *Water's Edge Café* provide an opportunity for a quieter drink and the chance to watch kingfishers offshore. The bars along the Pebble Beach promenade offer more action, especially as the night wears on. Here *Skala*, near the harbour, and *Sunrise* are complemented by the *Nostos Disco-Bar*, where you can join locals dancing in an outside courtyard bar. There are fewer bars along Sandy Beach but those that are here, like *Jetée* right on the sand near the post office, offer a quiet spot to linger over a sundowner. Further out, the town's only true dance **club**, the *Paleohora Club*, lies some way out at the north end of Pebble Beach close to the campsite. Sadly its open-air dance floor is no longer allowed to open at night, and it can get hot and sweaty inside.

Nightly showings at the open-air **cinema**, *Cine Attikon*, tucked away in the northern backstreets, are also worth checking out; most of their films are in English and programmes (advertised near the harbour and on a billboard outside the *Dhimarhío*; tickets €6) change daily.

West from Paleohóra to Koundourá

Follow the coast either way from Paleohóra and you'll find more beaches. To the **west** it's no longer a terribly pretty coastline, marred by an invasion of plastic greenhouses, but there are some excellent beaches and little coves along the way. The best of them are around **Grameno beach** after about 5km, where a small peninsula ensures sheltered water and there are trees for shade. On the landward side of the road here, *Taverna Grameno* (see p.391) is a superb place to eat, and there's also an excellent taverna on the small cove beach by the Dive Centre, a little before this.

Continuing along the road will quickly bring you to **Koundourá**, which also has rooms (see p.390) but is rather spoiled by more greenhouses. The paved road peters out 4km beyond Koundourá at **Kríos** ("cold"), another pleasant pebble beach where the water can be incredibly chilly due to underwater springs. The dirt road from here continues on to several shingly, deserted bays, where some people **camp** beside beautifully clear water. From here you can continue on foot right around the coast to Elafonísi (see p.384), roughly 10km away via a section of the E4 Pan-European footpath. This should be clearly waymarked, but it's still a comparatively tough, hot and shadeless walk with a tricky clifftop section, so be sure to carry plenty of water and to check conditions locally before setting out. To avoid the first rather tedious 5km of asphalt you could take a taxi as far as Koundourá.

East from Paleohóra to Soúyia

To the **east** of Paleohóra, things are simpler, although there are ominous signs of road-building and other development along the first part of the way. For now, though, the E4 Pan-European **footpath** traces the shore for miles beyond the campsite, passing a succession of grey pebble strips with fewer people clad in fewer clothes the further you venture. This path continues to Lissós (14km/4hr; p.399) and Soúyia (18km/5–6hr; p.397), and if you time it right you can return to Paleohóra by boat from Soúyia (currently leaving at 5.30pm in summer). Again you should carefully check out both the route and the boats beforehand, as the service deteriorates rapidly out of high season. The path is waymarked, but it doesn't simply follow the coast all the way, and there are one or two steep scrambles. Since the most scenic section is through the gorge between Lissós and Soúyia, it might be easier to do it from there.

An easier alternative walk to Lissós and Soúyia descends from **Prodhrómi**, 13km inland to the northeast of Paleohóra, which you could reach by taxi, halving the total walking distance to around 9km. A track on the village's southern edge winds 3km down to the hill of Pidaraki, near the coast, where it meets the E4 footpath. Here you turn east to reach Lissós (another 3km) and Soúyia.

The village of **Ánidhri**, 6km east of Paleohóra, which you pass en route to Prodhrómi, is particularly beautiful. It has a fourteenth-century church, **Áyios Yeóryios**, which has an unusual double altar and fine **frescoes** depicting the lives of Christ and Áyios Yeóryios by Ioánnis Pagoménos (John the Frozen), the most prolific of several painters whose signatures appear frequently around Sélinos. The village **bar** (actually the old village school, recently converted) makes a good place to pause for a drink, and has a pleasant terrace with views. Comfortable, bargain-priced en-suite **rooms** are available at *Metacom* (Ⓣ28230 42188, Ⓦwww.meta-com.de; ①) near the village (enquire at the bar), which also rents out a whole house for €490 per week sleeping up to six.

The Pelekaniotikós valley and Sklavopoúla

With your own transport, you could follow a **spectacular drive** along the road that heads **northwest from Paleohóra** and tracks the valley of the River Pelekaniotikós, calling at a string of charming Sélinos hamlets. To join the road, head out along Sandy Beach and then turn right on the edge of town, following signs to Voutás. This area saw devastating **floods** in the spring of 2000 when heavy rain fell on the mountains for three days, turning the river into a raging torrent that swept away roads, bridges, trees, olive groves and houses on its way to the sea. The evidence of this disaster is still clearly visible, but one tangible advantage is that most of the roads have been repaved, and there's plenty of excellent, easy driving.

At **Voutás**, 12km northwest of Paleohóra, there is the possibility of a detour to the isolated village of Sklavopoúla and its wonderful frescoed churches. Take the road towards Sklavopoúla, and 1km before Kítiros the small fourteenth-century church of **Ayía Paraskeví** is worth a stop to see some faded frescoes on its rear wall; one has a remarkably lurid portrayal of hell with devils putting sinners into the flames whilst others are being crushed by serpents. The road then climbs among rocky heights for 5km further to reach **Sklavopoúla**, set at an altitude of 640m and one of the remotest communities in the Sélinos, as well as a place with a considerable history. The nineteenth-century English traveller Robert Pashley made it here and identified Sklavopoúla as the site of Doulópolis, a Dorian city renowned for its military prowess. The village's present name ("Village of the Slavs") may stem from a resettlement of Slavs here by Nikiforas Fokas (see p.421) following his reconquest of Crete from the Saracens in 961, the settlers being perhaps Armenians from Bulgaria.

There are no fewer than seven churches in the vicinity of Sklavopoúla, all with wall paintings. As you come in you pass the church of **Áyios Yeóryios**, next to a school playground on the left, with some fine frescoes dating from the thirteenth century. To get the key, go behind the school to the house of Petros, the guardian. Continuing into the village, the other two notable churches – the **Panayía** and **Sotíros Christós** – are reached down a path next to the primitive *kafenío* on the left. Continue downhill along this path (a *kalderími* – the still-used Turkish name given to ancient tracks and cobbled ways) for 400m or so until you come to the rambling house of Mihaílis, the guardian. His multi-generational family is extremely welcoming and provides a delightful insight into a rural Crete long gone from other parts of the island. You will probably be offered the traditional welcome of sweet bread and a cool drink or even a *raki* before the key emerges. Then Mihaílis will lead you to see the churches nearby – the **frescoes** of the Panayía with superb gospel scenes and a portrait of the donor are the more interesting – and although he refuses money for his time, donations are welcome for the churches' upkeep.

Back on the main route north, you pass the villages of Kámatera and Arhondíko, beyond where the road winds circuitously through unpopulated but dramatic mountain scenery, to join the route that cuts across from the far west to the Paleohóra, a couple of kilometres south of **Stróvles**. From here Miliá, the Koutsamatádos ravine (p.379) and the north coast are all within easy striking distance, as is Elafonísi in the other direction. It's worth bearing in mind that **petrol stations** are non-existent in these remote regions, so you should fill up in advance.

Northeast of Paleohóra

Many other villages in the **Sélinos interior** are equally unspoilt and, if you have transport, almost any of the tracks into the hills are fascinating. More of the roads up here are paved every year, making access increasingly easy. Heading north out of Paleohóra on the main road, you'll soon reach a couple of signs to **Azoyirés**, one official, the other extolling the virtues of "Azoyirés, Paradise Village", with its museum and caves. The road up to the village is set amidst woods of cypress and pine, and is now paved all the way to Teménia, making this an excellent, if narrow and winding, short cut to Soúyia. In Azoyirés, head straight for the centre, where there are two **tavernas**, *Mikailis* and 🏃 *Alpha*. The latter is exceptionally friendly and helpful, and if you so much as stop outside will ply you with maps and local information on caves and walks by the river: they also have economical en-suite balcony **rooms** in a building nearby (☎28230 41620, ⓔhcroso@fox.gr; ①).

Armed with *Alpha*'s **map**, you'll be able to find the scattered local attractions relatively easily. The **museum** (officially Sat & Sun 9am–2pm; when closed enquire at the *Alpha*), a single-room record of the Turkish occupation, full of fascinating old stuff, is in a delightful location in the valley at the bottom of the village, by the old olive-oil factory and a chapel built into a cliff. A pretty path leads down there, above a tree-filled ravine where pine, cypress, olive and maple grow. The biggest of several local **caves** is in the other direction, on an easy-to-miss road which sets off left just before the tavernas and winds steeply upwards for nearly 2km (keep climbing and turning where there's any doubt about the way). At the top you have to park any transport and there's an obvious path leading on – look up and you'll see a cross, some 200m above, which marks your destination. Approaching the cave you may disturb quail (sometimes on the menu at the *Alpha*); the eerie sounds in the cave itself emanate from more birds, mostly pigeons, bizarrely amplified by the cave. Going down, there's a steep metal stairway and rock-cut steps descending 50m or so to a little shrine lit from above by dim, reflected light. If you have a powerful torch (the *Alpha* will lend you one if not), you can continue a fair way, although there's no proper path: frankly, it's not that impressive.

Beyond Azoyirés it's a further 10km or so to **Teménia**, where there's an interesting **church** and small archeological site as well as the welcoming *Ta Tamenia* **taverna** with delicious home-cooked food. Arriving from Azoyirés, you come to a road junction on the edge of the village. Turn right downhill along the Rodováni road where soon you'll pass a rebuilt stone chapel atop a low hill to the left and, about 200m further on, a sign on the right to ancient Hyrtakína. Head down this narrow track, and on your right you will soon see the charming drum-domed church of **Sotíros Christós**, whose entrance has some curious stone steps built into the sides of a shallow porch. It should be open (enquire at the nearby monastery buildings if not) and inside are a number of fine **frescoes** including a stirring image of a mounted Áyios Yeóryios slaying the dragon. To the left, the track takes a long, steep, nerve-wracking ascent to the hilltop site of the ancient Dorian city of **Hyrtakína** with plenty of cattle gates to open and close along the way. It makes for a bracing walk with fine **views** but identifying any definable buildings (not to mention the Cyclopean walls or a Temple of Pan referred to by archeologists) among the rocks and boulders once you get there is no task for the novice. Despite the broken potsherds covering the ground it's still hard to believe that this desolate and wind-lashed peak was the site of a thriving city-state two and a half thousand years ago.

Haniá to Soúyia

Although you can cut through by the route outlined above, the main **road to Soúyia** is the one that runs right across the island from Haniá. This follows the route to Omalós for about 13km before turning off through Alikianós to skirt west of the highest mountains. Beside this turning there's a large **war memorial**. The Cretans commemorated here were mostly local members of the irregular forces which defended the area known as "Prison Valley" in the Battle of Crete (you've already passed the prison; see p.343). Cut off from any other Allied units – who indeed believed that resistance here collapsed on the first day of the battle – the Greeks fought on even as everyone else was in full retreat. By doing so they prevented the Germans getting around the mountains to cut the road and guaranteed that the evacuation from Hóra Sfakíon could go ahead. In much earlier history, Alikianós was also the site of the wedding massacre that ended the Kandanoleon revolt.

Alikianós

Right in the centre of the orange-growing district known as the *Portokalahória* ("the orange villages"), **Alikianós** itself has a couple of churches worth a look. Once in the village, follow the Koufós road (signed) for a short distance to reach the small fourteenth-century church of **Áyios Yeóryios,** close to the road on the right. This used to have some fine fifteenth-century frescoes, but lost them as a result of damage in World War II. In an orange grove behind houses over the road from the church lie the ruins of the **Da Molini castle** (some locals refer to it as Da Moulin), which may have been the scene of the Kandanoleon wedding massacre (see p.333). To reach it, head in along the nearest street and, when you ask the way, you'll be conducted over back-garden fences to reach the weed-festooned ruin with impressive walls. The entrance lintel (which is now completely overgrown) carries the inscription *Omnia Mundi Fumus et Umbra* ("All in the World is Smoke and Shadow"), a sentiment to which the Venetians were particularly attached, and which ultimately turned out to be grimly accurate regarding their Cretan possessions.

Continue along the same road for a kilometre to reach the best of Alikianós's churches, **Áyios Ioánnis**, 50m down a signed track into more orange groves on the right. A beautiful fourteenth-century building (now in a ruinous state) on the site of at least two previous churches dating back to the sixth century, the church employs parts of the previous basilica in the construction of its apse. Inside, surviving **frescoes** depict the Ascension as well as a number of saints.

The Ayía Iríni Gorge and Moní

Back on the route south the road soon passes **Skinés**, a large village with several tavernas and *kafenía* set among extensive orange groves, before it starts to climb out of the valley into the outriders of the Lefká Óri. Here the citrus trees give way to leafier, deciduous varieties – chestnuts and planes especially – and the villages are a great deal smaller. Just over halfway across the island, near Ayía Iríni, there's a road signed to Omalós (see p.345), an excellent route that offers an effortless and exhilarating drive over extremely high mountains, with wonderful views and plenty of vegetation.

Ayía Iríni itself, a little under 30km beyond Skinés, is another very green village, with lots of old chestnut trees, although it is still suffering the aftermath of a great fire in the summer of 1994, which devastated a vast tract of land between the **Ayía Iríni Gorge** and Soúyia, setting fire to many villages en route. The gorge can be **walked** from Ayía Iríni as far as the coast at Soúyia, roughly 12km in all, though the last five are along the road – about a four-hour trek. Despite the fire damage it's an attractive hike, not too taxing and usually very quiet unless you're unlucky enough to coincide with one of the occasional tours (mainly from Paleohóra). The well-marked route down into the gorge (it's now another branch of the E4 footpath) can be picked up on the south edge of the village and is marked on the Petrákis *Haniá Trekking and Road Map* and on the larger scale Anavasi *Lefká Óri* map no.10.11 (see p.65). The *KriKri* café near the gorge entrance opens at 7am for breakfast (☎28230 51550, or information at *Zorba's* rooms in Soúyia) and can advise on the route. Shortly after this you will pass a warden's hut where you'll need to buy a **gorge ticket** (€1.50; proceeds go to gorge maintainence). The gorge is an easy **day-trip** from Paleohóra (the 6am Omalós bus passes through Ayía Iríni, and you can get the afternoon ferry back from Soúyia) or Soúyia (any Haniá bus will drop you); you could also get a taxi to the top from either of these places.

Continuing south by road, you start gradually to descend, looping down to occasional views of the Libyan Sea and, in the last few kilometres, tracing a gorge with Soúyia framed at the far end. Beyond Rodhováni are the remains of ancient **Elyrós**, the most important city in southwest Crete in Roman times and earlier; the site is unexcavated and, although signed from the road, there's very little to see apart from odd chunks of wall. In **Moní**, the last village before the coast, the delightful fourteenth-century **church of Áyios Nikólaos** has frescoes by Ioánnis Paganénos, including a huge and striking image of St Nicholas himself. Outside the church, take a look at the **campanile** or free-standing bell tower – it's an architectural curiosity and the only one known on the island. Before setting out for the church, ask in the first bar you pass on entering the village for the key: it's actually kept at a house a few doors along but they'll sort you out. The church lies along a track which descends from the road on the right about 50m beyond the bar.

Koustoyérako

Only about 5km short of Soúyia, a road cuts back to the ancient Sélinos villages of Livadás and **Koustoyérako**, the latter a very ancient village that is still the home of the Paterákis family, famed in the annals of resistance to German occupation. Manóli Paterákis was one of those who took part in the capture of General Kreipe (see p.427). He died some years ago at the age of 73, when he fell while chasing a wild goat through the mountains.

The village, like so many, has a long history of resistance to foreign occupation, and was destroyed by Venetians, Turks and Germans alike. In 1943, German troops entered the village, which the men had deserted, and rounded up the women and children in the village square:

> **They lined them all up, and, as they refused to speak, prepared to execute the lot. But, before they could press the trigger of their heavy machine-gun, ten Germans fell dead. For some of the village men – about ten – had taken up position along the top of a sheer cliff above the village, from where they could watch every detail, and, at just the right moment, had opened fire. Not a bullet went wide. Terrified, the Germans took to their heels…**
>
> George Psychoundákis, *The Cretan Runner*

Next day the Germans returned, but by then the village was deserted; they blew up the empty houses in frustration. Cóstas Paterákis, now in his eighties, who fired the first shot and killed the machine-gunner (Patrick Leigh Fermor has described this as one of the most spectacular moments of the war), still lives here.

While the villagers have no desire to become tourist attractions, Koustoyérako is a lovely and very friendly place, set beneath the heights of the Lefká Óri looking out over the Libyan Sea. At the entrance to the village there's a striking modern **war memorial**, and a simple **taverna**, next to the school and village playground. Further along, you reach the square, with a couple of *kafenía*. The famous shot was fired from the rocky cliffs above, to your right as you face inland. At the top of the village, to your left from the square, is a tiny Byzantine chapel, **Áyios Yeóryios**. Inside are some beautiful remains of frescoes, with sixteenth-century graffiti carved into them; the chapel itself may be as early as tenth century in origin. The inscription inside the door dates from sixteenth-century restorations and records various generations of the Kandanoleon family. The last named is one María Theotokópoulos, and from this tenuous connection comes the claim that **El Greco** (Doménico Theotokópoulos) came originally from Koustoyérako. In the graveyard is the tomb of another Kandanoleon, George. One of Crete's great revolutionary leaders, he led the sixteenth-century revolt against Venetian rule (see p.333) and his body was returned to his birthplace following his execution by the Venetians. Before setting out for the church (which is kept locked) you'll need to enquire at the *kafenío* on the square from where someone should be able to take you to the church, where the key will be retrieved from its hiding-place while you turn your back.

In summer French groups frequently camp by the school, and from here climb – with a guide – to Omalós and the gorge. If you ask permission, and take your meals at the taverna, you'd probably be allowed to **camp** here, too. The path to the Omalós plateau is now a branch of the E4 and so has been upgraded and waymarked; we haven't tried it, though, so if you do so be sure to get full details before setting out. Although Omalós is only some 12km away, the country in between is mountainous, remote and entirely uninhabited.

Soúyia

The south coast settlement of **Soúyia** is a small village slowly on its way to becoming a resort. However, archeological remains here have resulted in severe restrictions on building close to the sea and this means, for the moment anyway, that tourist development lags a long way behind its western neighbour, Paleohóra. There are no big hotels and no major tour operators, just lots of rooms, simple restaurants and bars, added to a couple of general stores which double as travel agents and bureaux de change. A rather unkempt little place – not particularly attractive at first sight – Soúyia tends to grow on you. Its best feature lies right at the end of the road: an enormous swathe of bay with sparklingly clean, clear sea and a long, pebbly beach. There's plenty of room to spread out here – even on summer weekends when it's popular with locals – and you could **camp** under the few scraggly trees if you wanted, although you'd be advised to get as far away from the central beach as possible to be left in peace. Around at the east end of the bay there's something of a nudist community – known locally as the **Bay of Pigs**.

The village **church**, down by the beach at the western end of an avenue flanked by tamarisks, is the village's only feature. The story goes – in typical Cretan fashion – that it was built after a local man slept here and dreamt that an ancient church lay beneath him and that he was being summoned to erect a new one on the site. Sure enough the ancient church was found and the new one built. Unfortunately the new building was far smaller than the old and at a different angle: as a result the sixth-century Byzantine mosaic which formed the floor of the original stuck out beyond the walls of the new one. Although most of the original mosaic is now in the archeological museum at Haniá, you can still see where it was. The first church was a part of ancient Syia, a port for Elyrós (see p.396) which flourished through the Roman and early Christian eras; other remains can be seen in the village and around to the east of the bay.

Practicalities

It's worth noting in advance that Soúyia has no petrol station or bank and although there's now a solitary **ATM** (outside *Pension Galini*; see opposite) the village lacks any formal tourist infrastructure – bus tickets, tours, car hire and the like are arranged through the shops, restaurants or hotels. The most useful sources of **information** on all things going on locally are the two **minimarkets** (Pelican and Polifimos) at the bottom of the main street near a junction where it meets the sea front: here you can **change money**, find out about **car hire**, check notices for local **tours** or book a **taxi**. **Taxi-boats** can also be arranged here or at the *Captain George* pension (see opposite). These are handy for getting to isolated beaches (or ancient Lissós; see opposite) along the coast, at reasonable cost split between four or five (especially if you walk one way and get the boat the other). Another supermarket, and a taxi office, are higher up the street beyond the *Raki* bar. **Internet** access is available at *Café Lotos* (see opposite).

Bus tickets are sold on the bus, and the 7am departure to Haniá and Omalós offers the opportunity to walk either the Ayía Iríni or the Samariá gorge – it meets the early bus from Paleohóra in Ayía Iríni, and from there one continues to Omalós and the other to Haniá, so you may have to change. The *Roxana* snack bar (close to the minimarkets) sells tickets for a weekly **boat to Elafonísi** (Wed 9am). **Boat tickets** for Paleohóra, Hóra Sfakión, Gávdhos and other south-coast destinations are sold at the *períptero* on the sea front, near the junction or at a booth on the harbour (at the western end of the sea front), which opens 1hr before each departure. There are two **cardphones**, both near the sea-front junction.

Accommodation

There are **rooms** everywhere. The first options – and some of the best – are off the main road at the top of the hill as it enters town; others, more expensive, are right on the sea front (mostly to the right from the sea-front junction); while another cluster of cheaper rooms can be found by turning left along the sea front and left again before the stream.

Captain George To the west off the main street, just below *Pension Galini* ☎28230 51133, ⓔg-gentek@otenet.gr. En-suite, a/c balcony rooms with fridge plus slightly pricier studios with kitchenette, in a pleasant garden setting. ③

Pension El Greco Down the lane past *Captain*

George ☎28230 51186. Upper-floor rooms place, where you are welcomed with a *raki* and which offers a choice of en-suite, a/c rooms, most with balcony and some with fridge and kitchenette. One of several here with a quiet, semi-rural atmosphere. ②–③

Pension Galini Main road, at the top of the hill ☎28230 51488, ⓔgalini@sougia.info. Big, comfortable a/c en-suite rooms with balconies. ②–③

Idomeneas Apartments Opposite *Pension Galini* ☎28230 51540, ⓔidomeneas@sougia.info. Modern, a/c studios and spacious apartments with TV and balcony. ④–⑤

Rooms Irtakina Downstairs from *Pension El Greco* ☎28230 51130. A beautiful garden, and choice of en-suite, a/c rooms. ③

Paradisos On the lane by the stream, left and left again at the sea-front junction ☎28230 51486. Simple en-suite rooms including some family ones with kitchenette; a couple of similar places are nearby. ③

Hotel Santa Irene On the sea front ☎28230 51342, ⓔnanadakis@cha.forthnet.gr. The fanciest place in the village, with modern, a/c, en-suite balcony studios and apartments with fridge (some with sea view) around a garden. ⑤

Zorba's On the sea front ☎28230 51353. Close to *Santa Irene*, a simpler, welcoming place for a/c en-suite rooms with fridge. ②

Eating and drinking

Places to eat are predominantly on the sea front, with a few more up the main road. At night, there are a couple of **disco-bars** which sometimes attract a crowd: the first, *Alabama*, is sited among the trees on the far side of the stream to the east of the village, whilst the other, *Fortuna*, is at the northern edge of town, on the left as you come in. Other more centrally located **bars** include elegant *Raki*, opposite *Rebetika* restaurant, with music after dark.

Café Lotos On the sea front, at the corner of the main road. Coffees and juices by day, drinks and music in the evening, plus Internet access.

Café Santa Irene On the sea front. Top choice for breakfast, juices and snacks.

To Kyma At the western end of the sea front. Good food and great location.

Liviko At the western end of the sea front below the church. A good bet for taverna standards and fresh fish, often with live music in the evening.

Omikron On the sea front to the east of the main road. German-run restaurant with a more northern European flavour, and some vegetarian choices.

Polifimos Just off the north end of the inroad from Hania. Longstanding Soúyia favourite run by Yiannis, one of the village's characters. He serves his own wine and the food – fish and meat – is cooked with the taverna's home-grown (and pressed) olive oil.

Rebetiko Halfway up the main street. Dutch-owned taverna with well-cooked traditional dishes – including plenty of vegetarian options – served on a delightful garden terrace.

Roxana At the bottom of the main street opposite the minimarkets. Cakes and savouries like *tirópita*, sandwiches and cold drinks to eat in or take away.

Lissós

The archeological site of **Lissós**, 4km west of Soúyia, is a great deal more rewarding than anything you'll see in Soúyia itself. The **walk** there, a little over an hour, is part of the pleasure: you set out on the road that heads west, behind the beach, and at the harbour turn right onto a track leading slightly inland. The route – also the path trodden by ancient pilgrims – is part of the E4 coastal path, so it's well marked with black and yellow splodges. It leads up a beautiful echoing gorge, which you follow for about thirty minutes, and then climb steeply out of towards the coast. After a short level stretch the sea comes into view, followed almost immediately by Lissós, below you at the back of a delightful little bay with the chapel of Áyios Kiriákos and the archeological site further inland.

An alternative way of seeing the site and saving a walk both ways is to book a **taxi-boat** (about €20 for up to five people) from Soúyia. Ideally in summer you'd either walk over early and get the boat to pick you up in the middle of the day (precarious embarkation), or have them drop you at Lissós's pebble beach late in the afternoon, leaving time for a look around the ancient site (you'll very likely have it all to yourself and it's just the place to open a chilled bottle of wine) before the walk back to Soúyia in the cool of the evening. The path back to Soúyia from the beach is fairly obvious as it climbs the steep hill on the east side of the archeological site.

The site

Originally a Dorian city, Lissós grew through the Hellenistic and Roman eras and continued to thrive, along with its neighbours Syia and Elyrós, right up to the Saracen invasion in the ninth century, when they were all abandoned. These places have little history, although it is known that they joined together around 300 BC – along with Hyrtakína in the hills behind, Pikilássos on the inaccessible coast between here and Ayía Rouméli, and Tarra, at modern Ayía Rouméli – to form the **Confederation of Oreioi**, and were later joined by Górtys and Cyrenaica (the latter in North Africa). The remains at Lissós are mostly Classical Greek and Roman.

The most important survival is an **Asklepion**, or temple of healing, built beside a curative spring against the cliffs on the east side of the site. The temple probably dates from the third century BC, although the **mosaic floor** (protected by a broken-down fence) which is its most obvious feature was added later, in the first century AD; it's a poignant ancient relic, however, depicting images of polychrome birds in its central section (including a quail) and elaborate and beautifully crafted geometric patterns on its outer borders. The excavations here revealed a hole dug through the floor which contained numerous broken statues and a headless image of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing; this was probably the work of fanatical early Christians who destroyed the temples, decapitated the statues (where they believed the spirit of the devil resided) and defaced the walls. Notice also the marble altar-base which would have supported a statue, and the "snake pit" (or hole to place sacrifices) next to it. On the gentler, western slope of the valley, opposite, are a group of tombs that look like small stone huts, with barrel-vaulted roofs – hardly the best advertisement for the healing temple. You'll also find a small ruined theatre and two thirteenth-century churches, Áyios Kiriákos – with a nearby **spring** – and Panayía, which reused older material from the site.

When you've completed your explorations, the small pebble **beach** provides solace in the form of a swim. If you're continuing the **walk west towards Paleohóra**, the path is again pretty obvious (there may be a guard in the hut at the site who can help, but don't rely on it): it's a long (10km), hot and lonely stretch of coast though, so carry plenty of water and don't try this alone. The spring mentioned above should be a reliable place to fill any bottles, even in summer, and there's a summer beach *kantina* at the foot of the Ánidhri Gorge, 3km before Paleohóra.

Gávdhos

Gávdhos, the southernmost point of Europe, is the largest of Crete's offshore islands and the only one with any significant population. Plain and somewhat barren, its attraction lies in its enduring isolation. The 50km of rough sea – over 3000m deep – separating it from the coast of Crete frequently proves too much for the small ferries, and the ports they serve have themselves only begun to see large numbers of tourists in the last few years. Consequently – and despite the fact that it's now possible to get a very basic package tour to Gávdhos – the trip to the island remains one more talked about than done.

Change, though, is approaching, and already you shouldn't expect solitude: in summer, there's a semi-permanent community of **beach-campers** who easily outnumber the local population, while in **August** huge numbers of young Greek trippers add to their number – at this time the beaches, which have no real infrastructure, few toilets and no means of clearing litter (although this has now improved), can get really unpleasant. There are also an increasing number of (mostly illegally constructed) summer houses, again mainly occupied in August. The indigenous population now comprises a mere six families (around fifty individuals), most of whom spend the summer making money from visitors and – being Cretans and Sfakians – the rest of the year feuding among themselves.

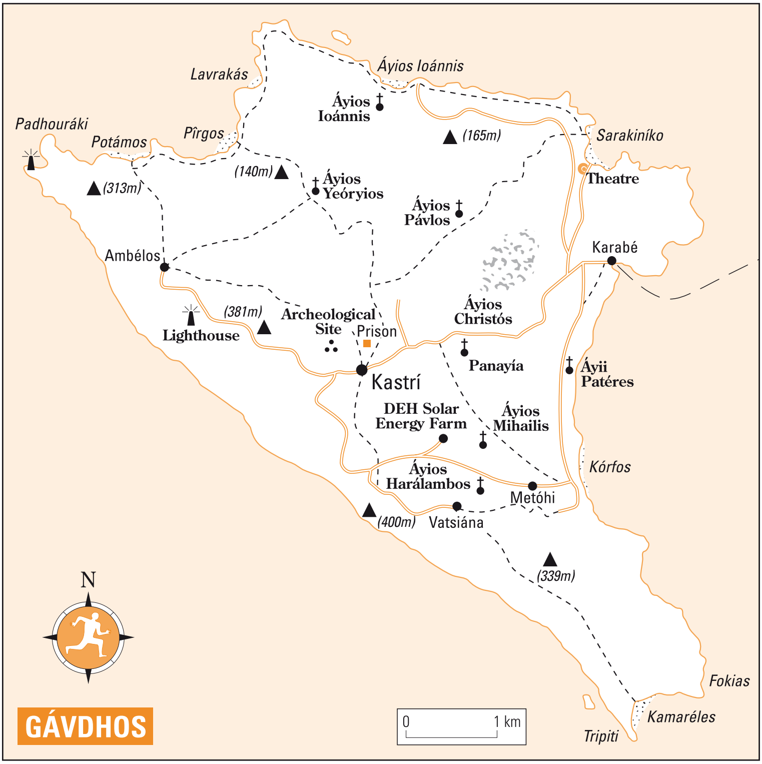
One of the reasons for the island's resurgence in popularity amongst Greeks was the publicity it received when it was discovered that several members of the November 17th terrorist group (finally broken up in 2003) had hideouts here. More obvious signs of change are the development of a sizeable concrete harbour – together with a port police office and restored lighthouse – the asphalting of some island roads, and the completion of an **electricity** generating station. To date very few places have been connected to the electricity (including most of the sea-front tavernas and rooms places), however, because they have either been built illegally or can't prove their ownership of the land (a legal requirement for connection to the mains). Meanwhile, they continue to rely on diesel generators and hope that an eventual government "amnesty" will allow them to hang on to their claims.

Kastrí serves as the island's "capital" (and the base for the island's new radio station, **Gávdhos 88.8FM**) but would hardly pass for a hamlet anywhere else, and the other villages are even more desolate clusters of bleak, stone-built dwellings surrounded by scrubland grazed by sheep, goats and poultry. In the relatively greener north and east, the low coast features a number of attractive **beaches**; in the drier and stonier southwest the island rises to 384m, its shoreline rocky and barely accessible. The interior, with four distinct settlements, is carpeted with ground-hugging pines, cedars and scrub which offer little shade, and in late spring the air is rich with the scent of wild thyme. But this can still be a pretty inhospitable environment, with summer temperatures frequently climbing well beyond 38°C.

To the northwest of Gávdhos (and passed en route from Paleohóra) lies the flat little islet of **Gavdhopoúlo**, inhabited only in summer by the occasional shepherd taking advantage of the grazing. If you want to visit, you'll have to arrange a **boat trip** with one of the local fishermen. A plan to sell off this islet to multinational oil companies who proposed to slice the top off it and turn the flattened core into a bunkering depot – with huge storage tanks – for supplying the whole of the Mediterranean was finally killed off in the late 1990s following a storm of protests, and after ecologists pronounced that this would effectively be a death sentence for Gávdhos.

Some history

Little is known of the island's early history and although evidence has been found of **Neolithic** and **Minoan** activity here, it was most probably not settled until **Classical Greek** times when it was a dependency of Górtys (p.138) and famous for its juniper berries. Despite Gávdhos's claim to be Calypso's island (visited by Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*), it only appears in verifiable record later as a place well known to the **Romans**, who christened it Clauda or Kaudos: the New Testament relates how St Paul was blown past Clauda in the storm which carried him off from Kalí Liménes (see p.154). Throughout its subsequent history the island was notorious as a **pirates**' lair, and a favourite open anchorage frequently used by them was that at Sarakiníko beach. To deal with this menace the Venetians contemplated building a fortress here as they had done on similar islands elsewhere,


GÁVDHOS
Lavrakás
Áyios Ioánnis
Áyios Ioánnis
Padhouráki
Potámos
Pîrgos
(165m)
Sarakiníko
(140m)
(313m)
Áyios Yeóryios
Theatre
Áyios Pávlos
Ambélos
Karabé
Pal. & Hóra Sfakíon
(381m)
Archeological Site
Prison
Áyios Christós
Lighthouse
Panayía
Áyii Patéres
Kastrí
DEH Solar Energy Farm
Áyios Mihailis
Kórfos
Áyios Harálambos
Metóhi
(400m)
Vatsiána
N
(339m)
Fokias
Kamaréles
Tripiti
0
1 km

but the project was abandoned due to the cost and time it would take to complete. In its more modern history the island was used by dictatorial governments as a place of **exile** for political opponents.

Since ancient times depopulation here has been acute and constant. In the Middle Ages, Gávdhos is said to have had eight thousand residents and had a bishop of its own: even in 1914 there was a population of 1400. Given the isolation and the stark severity of island life the drain is hardly surprising, but it has undoubtedly made conditions even harder for the few who remain year round.

Practicalities

Ferry connections to Gávdhos aren't bad in summer. There are ferries from Paleohóra via Soúyia (May–Sept Tues 8.30am, passing Soúyia 30min after departure; returns 3pm same day) and from Hóra Sfakíon (Sat and Sun from May–Oct at 10.30am; additional service on Fri June–Sept, and Thurs July–Aug; returns 5pm). Outside these months things are much less certain – there are occasional sailings all year round by the postboat taking essential supplies across (mostly from Paleohóra) but these are dependent on the weather, which is unpredictable even in high summer, and other circumstances. Try ringing the port office at Hóra Sfakíon (☎28210 95511) for the winter schedule. Whatever time of year, the **two- to**

three-hour crossing (depending on port and boat) can be rough, so take precautions if your seaworthiness is in doubt. A **bus** (€1) meets the ferry and makes the short trip to Sarakiníko and Áyios Ioánnis beaches with a return trip from both places about half an hour before the ferry departs.

There's a handful of **accommodation** possibilities around the island, which you should book from Paleohóra. **Rooms** are most obviously available around the harbour at Karabé (see p.404) and at each of the main beaches, Sarakiníko and Kórfos (see pp.404 & 406). Accommodation can also be had inland at Kastrí (see p.405), although why anyone would want to stay here in high summer is a good question, and elsewhere if you ask around. If you're prepared to **camp** you can pick your spot just about anywhere, on the beaches or in any number of sheltered locations inland, though towards the end of the summer mountains of rubbish tend to rise close to the most popular places; be aware of local sensibilities and take your rubbish away. If you camp or stay in rooms **mosquitoes** can be a problem; the lack of electricity means the best protection are the pyrethrin coils – the minimarkets often run out so bring your own.

The most obvious sign of the hardship of Gávdhos life is the paucity of **food** available. This is more of a problem in winter than summer, however, as during the season there is usually a decent supply of lamb and goat's meat (the island is famous for the quality of the latter) augmented with fish caught by local boats. With these exceptions and a few basic vegetables, almost everything else has to be imported from the mainland and there is little choice in any of the island's basic stores and not a lot more in the eating places (Karabé, Kórfos and Sarakiníko have the best options, with at least a chance of fresh fish). It makes sense to bring some supplies with you, especially if you plan to camp out. However, visitors who fail to spend anything at all – not surprisingly – irritate locals somewhat. The local *thimárisio* (thyme honey) is wonderful, and is usually on sale at the minimarkets and in some tavernas.

There is no bank or place to change money on the island so bring sufficient **cash** with you for your stay. If you're in a fix, most of the tavernas should be able to change foreign currency but you'll be relying on their idea of what the exchange rate is. You can now hire **mopeds** (and even **cars**) here, which certainly facilitates island exploration, though be sure they give you a full tank, as there's no fuel to be had around the island – and running out of petrol in some of the more godforsaken regions doesn't bear thinking about. There are **cardphones** at Sarakiníko beach and the harbour at Karabé, but the minimarkets often run out of cards; again, buy these on Crete to bring with you.

Water is also in short supply; although new wells have been sunk, the water from many is not drinkable and as there is very little springwater and most fresh water has to be drawn from wells or collected in rainwater cisterns, much of the summer's drinking requirement is imported in the form of mineral water; check with locals before drinking from any source of water you're not sure of. Most rooms on the island now have showers and relatively modern plumbing, but don't join those thoughtless visitors who insist on contaminating the limited fresh-water supply with soap.

In **emergencies** there is a new **police station** (☎28230 41109) attached to an equally new *dhimarhío* above the harbour at Karabé, a **doctor** (☎28230 42195) in Kastrí (usually an intern opting out of military service) and now easy phone contact with Crete as well as cardphones. The best advice, however, is not to tempt fate – especially as an accident could mean being airlifted by army helicopter, possibly incurring a hefty bill that your insurance may not cover. At least a few words of Greek would be extremely useful, though locals try their best with all visitors.

Around the island

As you approach Gávdhos, the harbour is hidden behind a headland, and the island looks totally uninhabited – only with the aid of binoculars might you pick out one or two isolated homes. The boat docks at **Karabé**, from where newly asphalted roads head north to **Sarakiníko** and south to **Kórfos**, whilst the island's main **road** heads west and inland from the harbour to **Kastrí**. The rough tracks that link the island's scattered settlements make ideal **walking** routes, and following the more remote of these will lead you to some magnificent isolated **beaches** in the north or, in the opposite direction, the rock formation at **Tripití**, the southernmost tip of Europe.

Karabé

The tiny old port at **Karabé** is dwarfed by the new concrete construction and is the place where ferries dock. Surrounded by a drab expanse of rock and scrub, a *kafenío* and a **taverna/rooms** place share the waterfront alongside a stubby concrete breakwater, whilst on the heights behind squat a few dwellings and a small white church. The *Litsa* taverna and rooms belong to *Rooms Tsigonakis* (☎28230 41104; ②), which offers air-conditioned rooms with and without bath. The taverna is a decent bet for meat and fish dishes. The nearby *Kalypso* (☎28230 42118, information at *Café Almyridha* in Paleohóra; ②), on the hill above the harbour, also has rooms with showers (when the water's on) and will collect you at the harbour if you ring ahead.

If you want to get to one of the **beaches** the easy way it's normally possible to find a **boat** here (ask at the taverna); Kórfos beach to the south and Sarakiníko around the head to the north are the most popular destinations. If you do rent a boat – particularly to one of the more isolated beaches – make sure to take along sufficient drinking water and make equally sure the boatman understands when you want to be picked up. Otherwise you can take the island's **bus** which meets each boat and transports arrivals to the Korfós, Sarakiníko and Áyios Ioánnis beach settlements. There's usually a great hubbub on the quayside when the ferry arrives (not much else happens here) and if you get offered rooms or have phoned ahead the proprietor will often transport you from the quayside to your accommodation – although the vehicle used may well be a tractor and trailer, a pick-up or, if you're very lucky, a minibus.

Sarakiníko and Áyios Ioánnis

Forty minutes' stiff walk will take you north across the headland, past the pretty little church of Áyios Yeóryios, to **Sarakiníko**, one of the best of the island's beaches, shaded by scattered tamarisk trees. A broad strip of golden sand with nudist campers settled at each end, it has eight or nine very basic **tavernas** here too, their terraces often crowded in August with vacationing Athenian professionals yelling into mobile phones. Behind the beach and tavernas an anarchistic village of unplanned, mostly breezeblock summer dwellings is growing as people from Crete and the mainland use squatter's rights to stake their claims. The sanitary facilities are usually a deep hole in the ground beneath each house. Each evening the sun goes down behind the island of Crete on the horizon and the Lefká Óri are silhouetted against a crimson sky; at the same time a rumbling chorus of generators splutters to life and does not let up until the small hours. This is also a nesting beach used by the threatened **loggerhead sea turtle** (see p.257), and the development here does not augur well for the future of the beach as one of its breeding grounds. Sarakiníko also now has an open-air **theatre** visible on the left as you arrive; concerts are often staged here in summer.

△ Beach, Gávdhos

For **rooms** try the friendly 🏃 *Gerti & Manolis* (ⓣ28230 41103, ⓔgavdos@cha.forthnet.gr; ④), which has en-suite stone-built studios, rooms and villas (⑥) and is perhaps the beach's best place for **food**. The beachfront *Taverna Despina* (ⓣ6978024769; ①) west of here acts as agent for some spartan rooms on the beach which have beds, shower and candlelight. Sarakiníko also has the island's **post office**, post box and a **cardphone** (all close to the taverna above) as well as a minimarket which stocks basic items and essentials. **Mopeds** (and **cars**) with a full tank can be hired from *Gerti and Manolis* for around €15 per day (including petrol) for the former and €30 per day and upwards for cars (plus petrol).

A three-kilometre hike to the west of Sarakiníko (or a ten-minute bus ride), passing close to the church of Áyios Ioánnis brings you to a fine isolated **beach** of the same name, **Áyios Ioánnis**, with high dunes and plenty of shade under the cedars. This beach has become a favourite summer hangout for a permanent hippy occupation, despite (or because of) the fact that there are few facilities and little fresh water. A **taverna** (*Teofilos*) and minimarket cater to visitors and campers. In August it is often by far the most crowded place on the island. Try not to add to the litter problems if you decide to camp here.

Kastrí

Kastrí, the island "capital", is an hour's walk along a steadily climbing road from Karabé. When you get there, it turns out to be a ghostly sort of place where only a handful of dwellings, mangers, stables and barns cluster around the old police station and *dhimarhío* (both rehoused to Karabé, see opposite), whilst in the surrounding parched and arid fields older dwellings gradually crumble away to become one with the weathered and fissured rock on which they stand. The last bar here has long ago closed, there is no shop, and most of the time the only sign of life is the odd chicken running for cover or goats foraging in the scrub. To the northwest of the village there is a minor (unfenced) archeological site from which some derive proof that the island was settled as far back as Neolithic times. And that's about it. Some of the dwellings are being refurbished by visitors from Crete, there's an organic farm of sorts and now the rather snazzy and incongruous *Gavdos Princess*

Apartments (ⓣ28230 41181, ⓦwww.gavdosprincess.gr; ⑦) with fully equipped and pricey air-conditioned **studios** alongside a **taverna** on the road in.

On the outskirts stands a substantial two-storey building where political prisoners were incarcerated between the wars in the 1930s; there have been attempts since to convert it to a hotel and a sanatorium, but currently it stands empty.

Ámbelos and Vatsianá

Climbing out of Kastrí the track heading west across the island reaches the ridgeline and divides. Close to this junction is the old island school, now redundant. The right branch leads to the sparse hamlet of **Ámbelos**, 3km north, from where there's a particularly fine view towards North Africa, a sealane ploughed constantly by enormous supertankers. On the way there you'll pass the impressive nineteenth-century **lighthouse** bombed by the Germans in 1941 and now fully and superbly restored as a **café** and **museum** (9am–9pm; free) depicting images, plans and sketches of other lighthouses throughout Greece. If you time your visit for early evening, the top of the tower is also a great place to watch Gávdhos's famed sunsets. A track north from Ámbelos leads to the scenic isolated beaches of **Potamós** – behind which you can explore a couple of spectacular ravines – **Pírgos** and, further east, **Lavrakás**; you are totally on your own here, there are no facilities, and you'll need to take along plenty of drinking water.

Turning left at the junction beyond Kastrí leads, after 3km, to **Vatsianá**, another three-dwelling hamlet marooned in a rocky, almost lunar landscape. One great surprise in Vatsianá is that it not only has a **bar**, but a **museum**, too. The bar, incidentally, is the last in Europe before you reach Africa and even more curiously its proprietor is the island's priest, *Papás* Manolis Bikogiannakis. The *papás*'s wife María looks after the customers and will cheerfully overcharge you for drinks, postcards and her exquisite *kéik* (cake), which she bakes freshly each morning. The museum is also the work of her husband, who has assembled the usual collection of junk and relics that give museums a bad name. Here, though, it doesn't matter, as it is so gratifying to have something to visit and someone to talk to, breaking the monotony of this inhospitable and desiccated landscape.

From Vatsianá you are in easy walking distance of Kórfos and its beach, to the east. Striking out more adventurously, the southernmost tip of a continent, Tripití, lies a mere 3km to the south.

Kórfos, Metóhi and Tripití

A twisting track east from Vatsianá leads to **Kórfos**, 2km away, where there's a good if pebbly beach – known locally as Yiorgo's beach, after the man who lives here with his family over the summer at the taverna *Panorama*, on the hill behind. The beach itself is dotted with Robinson Crusoe–style shacks and in the small cedar wood behind it, *Wood Art* is the driftwood-constructed refuge of a couple of Greeks from the mainland who have opted for the simple life and live from selling wood carvings and wooden jewellery to visitors.

The *Panorama Taverna* (ⓣ28230 42166; ②) has a few air-conditioned **rooms** with showers to rent or you can camp nearby (but ask first). Nearby *Taverna Rooms Yiannis* (ⓣ28230 42384; ②) is a similar set-up closer to the beach, also with air-conditioned rooms with showers. Both tavernas will collect guests from the harbour if you ring ahead. They also own **boats** and when these aren't being used to catch fish for the tavernas' kitchens they make boat-trips to Tripití (see p.408; around €5). Another possibility, up a track 1km inland from here, is the isolated *Rooms Metoxi* (ⓣ28230 42167; ③) in the hamlet of the same name with air-conditioned studios fronting a small pool, and with its own taverna and **mini open-air cinema** (open to all) showing original-version new films throughout the summer; the proprietor will also rent you a moped (or car) in order to get around.

Greek place names

ΑΓ ΜΑΡΙΝΑ	Αγ Μαρίνα	Ay. Marína
ΑΓ ΡΟΥΜΕΛΗ	Αγ Ρουμέλη	Ay. Rouméli
ΑΚΡΩΤΗΡΙ	Ακρωτίρι	Akrotíri
ΑΛΙΚΙΑΝΟΣ	Αλικιανός	Alikianós
ΑΠΤΕΡΑ	Άπτερα	Áptera
ΑΛΜΥΡΙΔΑ	Αλμυρίδα	Almirídha
ΑΝΟΠΟΛΗ	Ανόπολη	Anópoli
ΒΑΜΟΣ	Βάμος	Vámos
ΒΡΥΣΕΣ	Βρύσες	Vrísses
ΓΑΥΔΟΣ	Γαύδος	Gávdhos
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥΠΟΛΗ	Γεωργιόυπολη	Yeoryióupolis
ΕΛΑΦΟΝΗΣΗ	Ελαφον‹ση	Elafonísi
ΕΛΟΣ	Έλος	Élos
ΘΕΡΙΣΟ	Θέρισο	Thériso
ΚΑΛΑΜΙ	Καλάμι	Kalámi
ΚΑΛΥΒΕΣ	Καλύβες	Kalíves
ΚΑΝΤΑΝΟΣ	Κάντανος	Kándanos
ΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΙ	Καστέλλι	Kastélli
ΚΟΛΥΜΒΑΡΙ	Κολυμβάρι	Kolimbári
ΚΟΥΡΝΑΣ	Κουρνάς	Kournás
ΛΑΚΚΟΙ	Λάκκοι	Lákki
ΛΟΥΤΡΟ	Λουτρό	Loutró
ΜΑΛΕΜΕ	Μάλεμε	Máleme
ΜΕΣΚΛΑ	Μεσκλά	Mesklá
ΜΟΥΡΝΙΕΣ	Μουρνιές	Mourniés
ΟΜΑΛΟΣ	Ομαλός	Omalós
ΠΑΛΑΙΟΧΩΡΑ	Παλαιοχώρα	Paleohóra
ΠΕΡΙΒΟΛΙΑ	Περιβόλια	Perivólia
ΠΛΑΤΑΝΟΣ	Πλάτανος	Plátanos
ΠΟΛΥΡΡΗΝΙΑ	Πολυρρηνία	Polirinía
ΡΟΔΩΠΟΣ	Ροδωπός	Rodhopóu
ΣΑΜΑΡΙΑ	Σαμαριά	Samariá
ΣΟΥΓΙΑ	Σόυγια	Soúyia
ΣΟΥΔΑ	Σούδα	Soúdha
ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ	Σταυρός	Stavrós
ΣΦΑΚΙΑ	Σφακιά	Sfakiá
ΣΦΗΝΑΡΙΟ	Σφηνάριο	Sfinári
ΦΑΛΑΣΑΡΝΑ	Φαλάσαρνα	Falásarna
ΦΟΥΡΝΕΣ	Φουρνές	Fournés
ΦΡΑΓΚΟΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΟ	Φραγκοκάστελλο	Frangokástello
ΧΑΝΙΑ	Χανιά	Haniá
ΧΡΥΣΟΣΚΑΛΙΤΙΣΣΑΣ	Χρυσοσκαλίτισσας	Hrissoskalítissa
ΧΩΡΑ ΣΦΑΚΙΩΝ	Χώρα Σφακίων	Hóra Sfakíon
ΧΩΡΑΦΑΚΙΑ	Χωραφάκια	Horafákia

Easily reached by boat from Kórfos, or on a long, waymarked hike from Vatsianá, **Tripití** is the most southerly point of Europe. Doing it the harder way, it's a fairly easy downhill trek from Vatsianá (the way back up is more taxing), and you feel pretty elated when you reach the flat stretch of marshy ground before the **Kamaréles** strand. The beach here is pebbly with little shade but the water is brilliantly clear and a snorkeller's paradise, with lots of aquatic life to be seen. When you need a break, you can do what everyone else comes here to do: climb the famous **three-holed rock** and dangle your feet on the edge of a continent.

Travel details

Buses

Some bus services are restricted on Sundays. For the latest timetables and fares visit KTEL's websites: Ⓦwww.bus-service-crete-ktel.com, Ⓦwww.crete-buses.gr and Ⓦwww.ktel.org, Ⓦwww.ktel-heraklio-lassithi.gr.

Haniá to: Almirídha (4 daily; 8.45am, 11am, 2.30pm & 6.30pm; 1hr); Ayía Marína (every 15min 8am–10.45pm, less frequently 6.30am–8am and 10.45–11.30pm; 20min); Elafonísi (daily at 8.30 & 9.30am; 3hr); Falásarna (3 daily; 8.30am, 11am & 3.30pm; 2hr); Hóra Sfakíon (3 daily; 8.30am, 11am & 2pm; 2hr); Iráklion (18 daily; 5.30am–9pm; 2hr 30min); (one via the old road at noon; 4hr); Kalives (8 daily; 7am–8pm; 45min); Kastélli (16 daily; 6.30am–10pm; 1hr); Kolimbári (every 30min 6.30am–11.30pm; 1hr); Limnopoulis water park (5 daily; 10.45am–6pm; 30min); Máleme (every 30min 6.30am–11.30pm; 45min); Mesklá (weekdays 6.45am & 2pm; 30min); Omalós for the Samariá Gorge (4 daily; 6.15am, 7.30am, 8.30am 2pm; 90min); Paleohóra (6 daily; 5am–6pm; 2hr); Plataniás (every 15min 6.30am–11.30pm, less frequently 6.30–8am and 10.45–11.30pm; 30min); Réthimnon (18 daily; 5.30am–9pm; 1hr 15min); Skalóti for Frangokástello (1 daily; 2pm; 2hr 30min); Stavrós (via Horafákia; 6 daily; 6.50am–8.15pm; 30min); Soúyia (2 daily; 10am & 2pm; 2hr); Thériso (Mon, Wed & Fri 7am & 2.30pm); Vámos (6 daily; 7am–8pm; 30min); Yeoryioúpolis (all Réthimnon buses call at stop on E75 highway; 40 min); Yeráni (every 15min 8.30am –10pm, less frequently 6.30am–8am and 10.45–11.30pm; 40min).

Hóra Sfakíon to: Haniá (4 daily; 7am, 11am, 5.30pm & 7pm; 2hr); Plakiás (2 daily; 11am & 6pm; 1hr 30min).

Kastélli to: Elafonísi (daily; 10.30am; 1hr 30min); Élos (2 daily; 10.30am & 2pm; 1hr 30min); Falásarna (3 daily; 10am, 12.30 & 4.30pm; 30min); Haniá (16 daily; 6am–8.30pm; 1hr); Omalós (2 daily; 6am & 7am; 3hr); Soúdha (daily; at 6.30pm & 8.30pm to meet the ferries; 1hr 15min).

Paleohóra to: Haniá (5 daily; 7am–8pm; 2hr); Omalós, for Samariá Gorge (1 daily; 6am; 1hr 30min).

Soúdha to: Kastélli and Réthimnon/Iráklion (2 daily each way, connecting with the ferries; 1hr 15min; 1hr/2hr 15min).

Souyía to: Haniá (3 daily; 7am, noon & 6pm; 2hr); Omalós (for Samariá Gorge; 1 daily; 7am; 1hr).

Yeoryioúpolis to: Omalós, for Samariá Gorge (2 daily; 6.30 & 7.20am; 2hr).

Ferries

For the latest information for domestic and international ferries, visit Ⓦwww.greekislands.gr or Ⓦwww.ferries.gr. For the Gávdhos boats winter schedule ring Ⓣ28210 95511.

Ayía Rouméli to: Loutró/Hóra Sfakíon (May–Oct at 11.30am, 3.45pm, 4.30pm, and 6pm, plus 9am (except Thurs) June–Sept only; 30 min/1hr); Soúyia/Paleohóra (May–Sept daily at 4.45pm; 45min/1hr 30min).

Gávdhos to: Hóra Sfakíon (May–Oct Sat & Sun; June–Sept also Fri; all at 5pm; Jul–Aug also Fri 7am; 2–3hr); Paleohóra via Soúyia (May–Sept Tues at 3pm; 2–3hr).

Hóra Sfakíon to: Gávdhos (May–Oct Sat & Sun; June–Sept also Fri; all at 10.30am; July–Aug also Thurs at 7.30pm; 2–3hr); Loutró/Ayía Rouméli (May–Oct daily at 10.30am, 1pm, 4.55pm, plus 7pm (except Wed) June–Sept only; 30 min/1hr).

Kastélli to: Kalamáta (1 weekly; 7hr 30min); Kíthira/Pireás (2 weekly; 3hr 30min/12hr); Yíthio (1 weekly; 6hr).

Paleohóra to: Soúyia/Ayía Rouméli (May–Sept

daily at 9.45am; 30min/1hr 15min); Soúyia/Gávdhos (May–Sept; boat stops at Soúyia only if winds permitting; Tues 9am; 30min/2–3hr).
Sóudha to: Pireás (ANEK Line daily at 9pm; 9hr; Hellenic Seaways daily at 9pm; 4hr 45min).

Flights

Haniá to: Athens (5–6 daily on Olympic, 3 daily on Aegean; 50min); Thessaloníki (5 weekly on Olympic; 1hr 30min).

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Contexts

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History

The people of Crete unfortunately make more history than they can consume locally.

Saki

The discovery of the Minoan civilization has tended to overshadow every other aspect of Cretan history; indeed it would be hard for any other period to rival what was, in effect, the first truly European civilization. It was in Crete that the developed societies of the east met influences from the west and north, and here that "Western culture", as synthesized in Classical Greece and Rome, first developed.

The Stone Age

Crete's first inhabitants, **Neolithic cave dwellers**, apparently reached the island around 7000 BC. They came, most probably, from Asia Minor, or less likely from Syria, Palestine or North Africa, bringing with them the basics of Stone Age culture – tools of wood, stone and bone, crude pottery and simple cloth. A possible clue to the origins of these peoples may lie in the importance of bull cults at certain centres in Neolithic Anatolia.

Development over the next three thousand years was almost imperceptibly slow, but gradually, whether through new migrations and influences or internal dynamics, advances were made. Elementary agriculture was practised, with domestic animals and basic crops. **Pottery** (the oldest samples of which were found beneath the palace at Knossós) became more sophisticated, with better-made domestic utensils and clay figurines of humans, animals and, especially, a fat mother goddess or fertility figure. Obsidian imported from the island of Mílos was used too. And though caves continued to be inhabited, simple rectangular huts of mud bricks were also built, with increasing skill and complexity as the era wore on. One of the most important of the Neolithic settlements was at Knossós, where two remarkable dwellings have been revealed below the Central Court, and there is abundant evidence that many other sites of later habitation were used at this time – Mália, Festós, Ayía Triádha, the Haniá area – as were most of the caves which later came to assume religious significance.

The Bronze Age: Minoan Crete

Minoan Crete has been the subject of intense and constant study since its emergence from myth to archeological reality at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet there is still enormous controversy even over such fundamental details as who the Minoans were and what language they spoke. No written historical records from the time survive (or if they do, they have not yet been deciphered) so almost everything we know is deduced from physical remains, fleshed out somewhat by writings from Classical Greece, almost one thousand years after the destruction of Knossós. Nevertheless it is not hard to forge some kind of consensus from the theories about the Minoans, and this is what is set out below. Fresh discoveries may yet radically change this view.

One of the central arguments is over **dating**. The original system, conceived by Sir Arthur Evans, divided the period into Early, Middle and Late Minoan, with each of these again divided into three sub-periods – a sequence that has become extremely complicated and cumbersome as it has been further qualified and subdivided. Arcane distinctions between the pottery styles of Early Minoan IIa and IIb have no place in a brief history and a simpler system is used here (following the archeologist Nikólaos Pláton) of four periods: **Pre-Palatial**, proto-palatial or **First Palace**, neo-palatial or **New Palace**, and **Post-Palatial**. This has the additional advantage of avoiding many of the niceties of exact dating and of uneven development across the island. However, as many archeological texts and guides as well as numerous museums on the island use the Evans system, the approximate corresponding periods – Early Minoan (E.M.), Middle Minoan (M.M.) and Late Minoan (L.M.) – are given in brackets.

Pre-Palatial: 3000–1900 BC (E.M.–M.M.I)

Among the more important puzzles of Minoan society is its comparatively **sudden emergence**. During the centuries before 2600 BC, there were important changes on the island, and thereafter very rapid progress in almost every area of life. Villages and towns grew up where previously there had been only isolated settlements, and with them came craft specialists: potters, stonecutters, metalworkers, jewellers and weavers. Many of these new settlements were in the east and south of the island, and there was significant habitation on the coast and near natural harbours for the first time.

It seems safe to assume that these changes were wrought by a new **migration** of people from the east, who brought with them new technologies, methods of agriculture and styles of pottery, but most importantly perhaps, a knowledge of seafaring and trade. The olive and the vine – which need little tending and therefore help free a labour force – began to be produced alongside cereal crops. Copper tools replaced stone ones and were themselves later refined with the introduction of bronze. Art developed rapidly, with characteristic **Vasilikí ware** and other pottery styles, as well as gold jewellery and stone jars of exceptional quality, based originally on Egyptian styles. Significantly, large quantities of seal stones have been found too, almost certainly the mark of a mercantile people. They were used to sign letters and documents, but especially to seal packets, boxes or doors as proof that they had not been opened: the designs – scorpions or poisonous spiders – were often meant as a further deterrent to robbery.

At the same time new methods of burial appear – tholos and chamber tombs in which riches were buried with the dead. These appear to have been communal, as, probably, was daily life, based perhaps on clan or kinship groupings.

The first palaces: 1900–1700 BC (M.M.I–M.M.II)

Shortly before 1900 BC, the first of the palaces were built, at **Knossós**, **Festós**, **Mália** and **Zákros**. They represent another significant and apparently abrupt change: a shift of power back to the centre of the island and the emergence of a much more hierarchical, ordered society. The sites of these palaces were also no accident: Festós and Mália both dominate fertile plains, whilst Zákros had a superbly sited harbour for trade with the east. Knossós, occupying a strategic position above another plain to the south and west of Iráklion, was perhaps originally as much a religious centre as a base of secular power. Certainly at this time religion took on a new importance, with the widespread use of mountain-top peak sanctuaries and caves as **cult centres**. At the same time much larger towns were growing up, especially around the palaces, and in the countryside substantial "villas" appeared.

The palaces themselves are proof of the island's great prosperity at this period, and the artefacts found within offer further evidence. Advances were made in almost every field of artistic and craft endeavour. From the First Palace era came the famous **Kamáres** ware pottery – actually two distinct styles, one eggshell-thin and delicate, the other sturdier with bold-coloured designs. The true potter's wheel (as against the turntable) was introduced for the first time, along with a simple form of hieroglyphic writing. Elaborate jewellery, seals and bronzework were also being produced.

Cretan bronze was used throughout the Mediterranean, and its production and distribution were dependent on a wide-ranging **maritime economy**. For though Crete may have produced some copper at this time, it never yielded tin, the nearest significant sources of which were as distant as modern Iran to the east, central Europe in the north, Italy, Spain, Brittany and even Britain in the west. While some claim that Minoan ships actually sailed as far afield as the Atlantic, it seems more likely that the more exotic goods were obtained through middlemen. Nevertheless, Crete controlled the trade routes in the Mediterranean, importing tin, copper, ivory, gold, silver and precious stones of every kind, exporting timber from its rich cypress forests, olive oil, wine, bronze goods and its fine pottery, especially to Egypt. Minoan colonies or trading posts were established on many Cycladic islands as well as the island of Kíthira off the Peloponnese, Rhodes and the coast of Asia Minor; a fleet of merchant vessels maintained regular trade links between these centres and, above all, with Egypt and the east.

Around 1700 BC, the palaces were destroyed for the first time, probably by earthquake, although raiders from the early Mycenaean Greek mainland may also have seized this opportunity to raid the island whilst it was temporarily defenceless; this may well account for the wealth of gold and other treasure – much of it obviously Cretan – found in the later royal shaft graves at Mycenae.

The New Palace Period: 1700–1450 BC (M.M.III–L.M.I)

Though the destruction must have been a setback, Minoan culture continued to flourish, and with the palaces reconstructed on a still grander scale the society entered its golden age. It is the new palaces which provide most of our picture of Minoan life, and most of what is seen at the great sites – Knossós, Festós, Mália, Zákros – dates from this period.

The **architecture** of the new palaces was of an unprecedented sophistication: complex, multistorey structures in which the use of space and light was as luxurious as the construction materials. Grand stairways, colonnaded porticoes and courtyards, brightly frescoed walls, elaborate plumbing and drainage, and great magazines in which to store the society's accumulation of wealth, were all integral, as were workshops for the technicians and craftsmen, and areas set aside for ritual and worship.

Obviously it was only an elite which enjoyed these comforts, but conditions for the ordinary people who kept Minos and his attendants in such style appear to have improved too: towns around the palaces and at sites such as Gourniá and Palékastro were growing as well. (It was Arthur Evans who named Minoan society after the legendary King Minos, but there is little doubt that Minos was in fact the title of a dynasty of priest/kings, a word rather like "Pharaoh".)

Very little is known of how the society was organized, or indeed whether it was a single entity ruled from Knossós or simply several city-states with a common cultural heritage. However, in an intriguing reference to Crete in his *Politics*, Aristotle implied that a caste system had operated in the time of Minos. Clearly, though, it was a society in which **religion** played an important part. The great Corridor of the Procession fresco at Knossós depicted an annual delivery of tribute, apparently to a Mother Goddess; bull-leaping had a religious significance too; and in all the palaces substantial chambers were set aside for ritual purposes. Secular leaders were also religious leaders.

That Minoan society was a very open one is apparent too. There are virtually no **defences**, internal or external, at any Minoan site, and apparently the rulers felt no threat either from within or without, which has led scholars to emphasize a military strength based on seapower. As far as internal dissent goes, it seems safe to assume that the wealth of the island filtered down, to some extent at least, to all its inhabitants: the lot of a Minoan peasant may have been little different from that of a Cretan villager as little as fifty years ago.

Externally, **maritime supremacy** was further extended: objects of Cretan manufacture turn up all over the Mediterranean and have even been claimed as far afield as Britain and Scandinavia (amber from the Baltic certainly found its way to Crete). Behind their seapower the Minoans clearly felt safe, and the threat of attack or piracy was further reduced by the network of colonies or close allies throughout the Cycladic islands – Thíra most famously but also at Mílos, Náxos, Páros, Mikonós, Ándhros and Dílos – and in Rhodes, Cyprus, Syria and North Africa. Nevertheless, this appears to have remained a trading empire rather than a military one.

Cultural advances

If the New Palace period was a high point of Minoan power, it also marked the apogee of arts and crafts in the island: again, the bulk of the objects you'll admire in the museums dates from this era. The **frescoes** – startling in their freshness and vitality – are the most famous and obviously visible demonstration of this florescence. But they were just the highly visible tip of an artistic iceberg. It was in intricate small-scale work that the Minoans excelled above all. Naturalistic sculpted figures of humans and animals include the superb ivory bull-leaper, the leopard-head axe and the famous snake goddesses or priestesses, all of them on show in the Iráklion Archeological Museum. The carvings on seal stones of this era are of exceptional delicacy – a skill carried over into beautifully delicate gold jewellery. Examples of stone vessels include the bull's head rhyton from Knossós and the three black vases from Ayía Triádha, which are among the museum's most valuable possessions. And pottery broke out into an enormous variety of new shapes and design motifs, drawing inspiration especially from scenes of nature and marine life.

The other great advance was in writing. A new form of script, **Linear A**, had appeared at the end of the First Palace period, but in the new palaces its use became widespread. Still undeciphered, Linear A must record the original, unknown language of the Minoans: it seems to have been used in written form almost exclusively for administrative records – stock lists, records of transactions and tax payments. Even were it understood, therefore, it seems unlikely that the language would reveal much. The pieces which have survived were never intended as permanent records, and have been found intact only where the clay tablets used were baked solid in the fires which destroyed the palaces. It is possible that a more formal record, an abstract of the annual accounts, was kept on a more valuable but also more perishable material such as imported papyrus (the Minoans had strong trading links with Egypt) or even a paper produced from native date-palm leaves. There is evidence in the Iráklion museum of the use of ink, which lends support to this proposition.

Destruction

Around 1600 BC the island again saw minor earthquake damage, though this was swiftly repaired. But in about 1450 BC came destruction on a calamitous scale: the palaces were smashed and (with the exception of Knossós itself) burned, and smaller settlements across the island were devastated. The cause of this disaster is still the most controversial of all Minoan riddles, and until recently the most convincing theory linked it with the explosion of the volcano of **Thíra** in about 1500 BC (but see p.418) – a blast which may have been five times as powerful as that of Krakatoa. The explosion threw up great clouds of black ash and a huge tidal wave, or waves. Coastal settlements would have been directly smashed by the wave, and perhaps further burnt by the overturn of lamps lighted on a day made unnaturally dark by the clouds of ash. Blast, panic and accompanying earth tremors would have contributed to the wreck. And then, as the ash fell, it apparently coated the centre and east of the island in a poisonous blanket under which nothing could grow, or would grow again, for as much as fifty years. Recent surveys by vulcanologists have traced ash from the explosion as far away as Greenland, the Black Sea and Egypt, suggesting that the thousands of tons of ash and pumice thrown into the atmosphere by the blast created a "nuclear winter" across much of Europe and beyond.

Only at Knossós was there any real continuity of habitation, and here it was with **Mycenaean Greeks** in control, bringing with them new styles of art, a greater number of weapons and, above all, keeping records in a form of writing known as **Linear B**, an adaptation of Linear A used to write in an early Greek dialect. In about 1370 BC, Knossós was itself burnt, whether by rebellious Cretans, a new wave of Mycenaeans or perhaps as a result of another natural disaster on a smaller scale.

Such at least is the prevailing theory. But it has its problems – why, for example, should Festós have been burnt when it was safe from waves and blast on the south side of the island? And why should the eruption that vulcanologists dated to 1500 BC (but see p.418) have had such a dramatic effect only fifty years later – indeed there are signs that away from the worst effects of the devastation many areas on Crete experienced comparative prosperity after it. As the debate continues, the best that can be said currently is that the volcano theory fits the available evidence better than most of its rivals. But many scholars still claim that the facts are more consistent with destruction by human rather than natural causes. The main counter-theory assumes an invasion by the Mycenaeans and points to some evidence that Linear B was in use at Knossós before 1450 BC. But if the Mycenaeans came to conquer, they would have gained nothing by destroying the society already flourishing on Crete; nor would they have subsequently left the former population centres deserted for a generation or more.

A third theory attempts to answer these inconsistencies, suggesting that an **internal revolt** by the populace against its rulers (possibly in the wake of the chaos caused by the Thíra eruption) could provide an explanation. This theory would fit the evidence from sites such as Mírtos Pírgos on the south coast, where a villa dominating the site was burned down whilst the surrounding settlement remained untouched. Needless to say this theory does not find favour with those who see

Minoan civilization as a haven of tranquil splendour, but it does fit with the later Greek tradition of a tyrannical Minos oppressing not only his own people but those abroad as well.

The confusion surrounding the above theories was dramatically added to in 2005 when Danish vulcanologists working on Thíra discovered an **olive tree branch** buried inside a rock face formed from volcanic debris. The researchers are convinced that the tree was alive when buried in the cataclysmic eruption. The branch's growth rings were intact and using radio-carbon dating the researchers were able to date the tree's death to between 1627 and 1600 BC. If this dating is correct it suggests that the eruption occurred at least one hundred years earlier than previously thought. It has also plunged Ancient Aegean chronology into confusion. Historians tend to rely on the Egyptian chronology (with its long history, king lists and 365-day years) for setting Minoan dates. Accepted thinking thus far is that Minoan civilization was contemporary with that of the Egyptian New Kingdom (dated ca.1550–1050 BC). If the vulcanologists' new dating is correct and Minoan civilization was effectively collapsed ca.1600 BC then this is wildly out of synch. As one Cretan archeologist put it, "We now have absolute chaos as far as giving years to events is concerned and something must give – I think it will be Egyptian dates which are now out by up to two centuries."

Post-Palatial: 1450–1100 BC (L.M.II–L.M.III)

From their bridgehead at Knossós, the Mycenaeans gradually spread their influence across the island as it became habitable again. By the early fourteenth century BC they controlled much of Crete, and some of the earlier sites, including Gourniá, Ayía Triádha, Tílissos and Palékastro, were **reoccupied**. It is a period which is still little-known and which was written off by the early Minoan scholars almost entirely. However, more recent excavations are revealing that the island remained productive, albeit in a role peripheral to the mainland.

In particular **western Crete** now came into its own, as the area least affected by the volcano. **Kydonia** became the chief city of the island, still with a considerable international trade and continuing, in its art and architecture, very much in the Minoan style. But Kydonia lies beneath modern Haniá and has never been (nor is ever likely to be) properly excavated – another reason that far less is known about this period than those which preceded it. In **central Crete** the main change was a retreat from the coasts, a sign of the island's decline in international affairs and trade, and perhaps of an increase in piracy. Even here, however, despite the presence of new influences, much of the art is recognizably Minoan. Most of the famous clay and stone *lárnakes* (sarcophagi) – which were a distinctly new method of burial – date from this final Minoan era.

More direct evidence of the survival of Crete comes in Homer's account of the **Trojan War**, when he talks of a Cretan contingent taking part under King Idomeneus (according to him, the grandson of Minos). The war and its aftermath – a period of widespread change – also affected Crete. In the north of Greece the Mycenaeans were being overrun by peoples moving down from the Balkans, in particular the **Dorians**. Around 1200 BC the relative peace was disrupted again: many sites were abandoned for the last time, others burnt. Briefly, Mycenaean influence became yet more widespread, as refugees arrived on the island. But by the end of the twelfth century BC, Minoan culture was in terminal decline, and Crete was entering into the period of confusion which engulfed most of the Greek world. Some of the original population of the island, later known as **Eteo-Cretans** (true Cretans), retreated at this time to mountain fastnesses at sites such as Présos and Karfí, where they survived, along with elements of Minoan culture and language, for almost another millennium.

Dorian and Classical Crete

By the end of the twelfth century, the bulk of the island had been taken over by the **Dorians**: there may have been an invasion, but it seems more probable that the process was a gradual one, by settlement. At any event, over the succeeding centuries the Dorians came to dominate the central lowlands, with substantial new cities such as Láto near modern Áyios Nikólaos.

Dorian Crete was not in any real sense a unified society: its cities warred with each other and there may, as well as the Dorians and Eteo-Cretans, have been other cultural groupings in the west, at Kydonia and sites such as Falásarna and Polyrínia. Nevertheless the island saw another minor **artistic renaissance**, with styles now mostly shared with the rest of the Greek world; in the making of tools and weapons, **iron** gradually came to replace bronze.

Much the most important survival of this period, however, is the celebrated **law code** from Górtys. The code (see p.140) was set down around 450 BC, but it reflects laws which had already been in force for hundreds of years: the society described is a strictly hierarchical one, clearly divided into a ruling class, free men, serfs and slaves. For the rulers, life followed a harsh, militaristic regime similar to that of Sparta – the original population, presumably, had been reduced to the level of serfs.

As mainland Greece approached its **Classical Age**, Crete advanced little. It remained a populous island, but one where a multitude of small city-states were constantly vying for power. Towns of this period are characterized by their heavy defences, and most reflected the Górtys laws (Górtys remained among the most powerful of them) in tough oligarchical or aristocratic regimes. At best, Crete was a minor player in Greek affairs, increasingly known as the den of pirates and as a valuable source of mercenaries unrivalled in guerrilla tactics. The island must have retained influence though, for it was still regarded by Classical Athenians as the source of much of their culture, and its strict institutions were admired by many philosophers. In addition, many Cretan shrines and caves show unbroken use from Minoan through to Roman times, and those associated with the birth and early life of Zeus (the Dhiktean and Idean caves especially) were important centres of pilgrimage.

The multitude of small, independent **city-states** is well illustrated by the Confederation of Oreoi, an accord formed around 300 BC between Élyros, Lissós, Hyrtakina, Tarra, Syia (modern Soúyia) and Pikílassos, six towns in a now barely populated area of the southwest. They were later joined in the Confederation by Górtys and Cyrenaica (in North Africa). Meanwhile Roman power was growing in the Mediterranean, and Crete's strategic position and turbulent reputation drew her inexorably into the struggle.

Rome and Byzantium

From the second century BC onwards, **Rome** was drawn into wars in mainland Greece, and the involvement of Cretan troops on one or often both sides became an increasing irritation. The island was also a notorious haven for pirates that frequently preyed upon Roman merchant vessels. Hannibal was staying at Górtys at the time of one Roman attempt to pacify the island, around 188 BC. More than a century passed with only minor interventions, however, before Rome could turn its full attention to Crete – the last important part of the Greek world not under its sway.

In 74 BC Marcus Antonius (father of Mark Antony) attempted an invasion mainly aimed at chastising the pirates, but was heavily defeated by the Kydonians. A fresh attempt was made under **Quintus Metellus** (afterwards called Creticus) in 69 BC. This time a bridgehead was successfully established by exploiting divisions among the Cretans: Metellus was supported in his initial campaign against Kydonia by its rivals at Polyrínia. The tactic of setting Cretan against Cretan served him well, but even so it took almost three years of bitter and brutal warfare before the island was subdued in 67 BC. It was a campaign marked by infighting not only among the Cretans – Górtys was among those to take Metellus's side – but also between Romans, with further forces sent from Rome in an unsuccessful bid to curb Metellus's excesses and his growing power.

With the conquest complete, peace came quickly and was barely disturbed even in the turbulent years of Julius Caesar's rise and fall. Perhaps this was in part because there was little immediate change in local administration, which was simply placed under Roman supervision. At the same time, the end of the civil wars brought much greater prosperity: Crete was combined with Cyrenaica (in North Africa) as a single province whose capital was at **Górtys**, and though there was little contact between the two halves of the province, both were important sources of grain and agricultural produce for Rome.

Through the first and second centuries AD, important public works were undertaken throughout Crete: roads, aqueducts and irrigation systems, important cities at Knossós, Áptera, Lyttos and others, as well as considerable grandeur at Górtys. **Christianity** arrived with St Paul's visit around 60 AD; soon after, he appointed Titus as the island's first bishop to begin the conversion in earnest. Around 250 AD, the Holy Ten – Áyii Dhéka – were martyred at Górtys, probably during the first great persecution of the Christians initiated by the emperor Decius.

With the split of the Roman empire at the end of the fourth century, Crete found itself part of the eastern empire under **Byzantium**. The island continued to prosper – as the churches which were built everywhere testify – but in international terms it was not important. Byzantine rule, here as everywhere, imposed a stiflingly ordered society, hierarchical and bureaucratic in the extreme. Of the earliest churches only traces survive, in particular of mosaic floors like those at Soúyia or Thrónos, though there are more substantial remains at Górtys, of the basilica of Áyios Títos.

Then in 824 Crete was invaded by a band of **Arabs** under Abu Hafs Omar. Essentially a piratical group who had been driven first from Spain and then Alexandria, they nevertheless managed to keep control of the island for well over a century. There was not much in the way of progress at this time – for its new masters the island was primarily a base from which to raid shipping and launch attacks on the Greek mainland and other islands – but there was a fortress founded

▲ Áptera, Haniá

at al-Khandak, a site which later developed into Iráklion. At the same time Górtys and other Byzantine cities were sacked and destroyed.

After several failed attempts, the Byzantine general **Nikifóras Fokás** reconquered Crete in 961, following a siege at Khandak in which he catapulted the heads of his Arab prisoners over the walls. For a while the island revived, boosted by an influx of colonists from the mainland and from Constantinople, including a number of aristocratic families (the Arhontopouli) whose power survived throughout the medieval era. By now, however, the entire empire was embattled by Islam and losing out in trade to the Venetians and Genoese. Frescoed churches continued to be built, but most were small and parochial.

Ironically enough it was not Muslims who brought about the final end of Byzantine rule, but Crusaders. The **Fourth Crusade** turned on Constantinople in 1204 (at the instigation of the Venetians), sacking and burning the city. The leader of the Crusade, Prince Boniface of Montferrat, ceded Crete to the Venetians for a nominal sum.

Venetian Crete

Before Venice could claim its new territory, it had to drive out its chief commercial rivals, the **Genoese**, who had taken control in 1206 with considerable local support. By 1210 the island had been secured, though for more than a century thereafter the Genoese pursued their claim, repeatedly siding with local rebels when it looked like there was a chance of establishing a presence on the island.

The Venetians, however, were not going to surrender the prize lightly. Crete for them was a vital resource, both for the control of eastern Mediterranean trade routes which the island's ports commanded, and for the natural wealth of the agricultural land and the timber for shipbuilding. The Venetian system was rapidly and stringently imposed, with Venetian overlords, directly appointed from Venice, administering what were effectively a series of feudal fiefdoms.

It was a system designed to exploit Crete's resources as efficiently as possible, and not surprisingly it stirred up deep resentment from the beginning. There were constant **rebellions** throughout the thirteenth century, led as often as not by one or other of the aristocratic Byzantine families from an earlier wave of colonization. Certainly the wealthy had most to lose: it was their land which was confiscated to be granted to military colonists from Venice (along with the service of the people who lived on it), and their rights and privileges which were taken over by the new overlords. The rebellions were in general strictly noble affairs, ended by concessions of land or power to their Cretan leaders. But there were more fundamental resentments too. Heavy taxes and demands for feudal service were widely opposed – by the established colonists almost as much as by the natives. And the **Orthodox Church** was replaced by the Roman as the "official" religion, the senior clergy expelled and much Church property seized. Local priests and monasteries which survived helped fuel antagonism: even from this early date the monasteries were becoming known as centres of dissent.

In the mid-fourteenth century, one of the most serious revolts yet saw the Cretans and second-generation Venetian colonists fighting alongside each other, in protest at the low fixed prices for their produce, steep taxes and the continued privileges granted to "real" Venetians. Although on this occasion the revolt was suppressed particularly fiercely, the end result of this and the other rebellions was a gradual relaxation of the regime and integration of the two communities – or at least their leaders. The **Middle Ages** were perhaps the most productive years in Crete's history, with exports of corn, wine, oil and salt, the ports busy with transshipment business and the wooded hillsides being stripped for timber.

After 1453, and the final fall of Constantinople, Crete saw a spectacular cultural renaissance as a stream of refugees arrived from the east. **Candia** – as the island and its capital were known to the Venetians – became the centre of Byzantine art and scholarship. From this later period, and the meeting of the traditions of Byzantium and the Italian Renaissance, come the vast majority of the works of art and architecture now associated with the Venetian era. The great icon painter Dhamaskinós studied alongside El Greco in the school of Ayía Ekateríni in Iráklion; the Orthodox monasteries flourished; and in literature the island produced, among others, what is now regarded as its greatest work – the Erotókritos (see p.461).

But it was the growing **external threat** which stimulated the most enduring of the Venetian public works – the island defences. Venice's bastions in the mainland Middle East had fallen alongside Constantinople, and in 1573 Cyprus too was taken by the Turks, leaving Crete well and truly in the front line. Large-scale pirate raids had already been common: in 1538 Barbarossa had destroyed Réthimnon and almost taken Haniá, and in the 1560s there were further attacks. Across the island, cities were strengthened and the fortified islets defending the seaways were repaired and rebuilt. As the seventeenth century wore on, however, Venice itself was in severe decline: Mediterranean trade was overshadowed by the New World, a business dominated by the Spanish, English and Dutch.

Finally, in 1645 an attack on an Ottoman convoy provided the excuse for an all-out **Turkish assault** on Crete. Haniá fell after a siege which cost forty thousand Turkish lives, and Réthimnon rapidly followed. By 1648 the Turks controlled the whole island except **Iráklion**, and they settled down to a long siege. For 21 years the city resisted, supplied from the sea and with moral support at least from most of Europe. The end was inevitable, though, and from the Turkish point of view there was no hurry: they controlled the island's produce, they were well supplied, and they enjoyed a fair degree of local support, having relaxed the Venetian rules – for example, they allowed Orthodox bishops back into Crete. By 1669 the city was virtually reduced, and in a final effort the pope managed to persuade the French to send a small army. After a couple of fruitless sorties involving heavy losses, the French withdrew in an argument over the command. On September 5, Iráklion surrendered, leaving only the three fortified islets of Soúdha, Spinalónga and Gramvóusa in Venetian hands, where they remained until surrendered by treaty in 1715.

Turkish Crete

It is arguable whether the **Turkish occupation** was ever as stringent or arduous as the Venetian had been, but its reputation is far worse. In part this may simply be that its memory is more recent, but Turkish rule was complicated too by the religious differences involved, and by the fact that it survived into the era of resurgent Greek nationalism and Great Power politics.

If on their arrival the Turks had been welcomed, it was not a long-lived honeymoon. Once again Crete was divided, now between powerful pashas, and once again it was regarded merely as a resource to be exploited. The Ottoman Empire was less strictly ordered than the Venetian, but it demanded no less: rather than attempt to take control of trade themselves, the Turks simply imposed crippling taxes. There were fewer colonists than in the Venetian era, and they took far less interest in their conquest so long as the money continued to come in. Very little was reinvested: outside the cities there was hardly any building at all, and roads and even defences fell into gradual disrepair. Imposition of local administration was left to local landlords and the mercenary **Janissaries** they controlled. At the local level, then, there was a further level of exploitation as these men too took their cut. Stultified by heavy taxes and tariffs, slowed by neglect, the island economy stagnated.

One way to avoid the worst of the burden was to become a Muslim and, gradually, the majority of the Christian population was converted to **Islam** – at least nominally. Conversion brought with it substantial material advantages in taxation and rights to own property, and it helped avoid the worst of the repression which inevitably followed any Christian rebellion. These Greek Muslims were not particularly religious: even among the Turks on the island, Islamic law seems to have been loosely interpreted, and many continued to worship as Christians in secret, but the mass apostasies served to further divide the island. For those who remained openly Christian the burden became increasingly heavy as there were fewer to bear it. Many took to the mountains, where Turkish authority barely reached.

As the occupation continued, the Turks strengthened their hold on the cities and the fertile plains around them, while the mountains became the stronghold of the Christian *pallikáres*. The first major **rebellion** came in 1770, and inevitably it was centred in Sfakiá. Under **Dhaskaloyiánnis** (see p.360) the Cretans had been drawn into Great Power politics – drawn in and abandoned, for the promised aid from Russia never came. With the failure of this struggle, Sfakiá was itself brought under Turkish control for a while. But a pattern had been set, and the nineteenth century saw an almost constant struggle for independence.

At the beginning of the century the Ottoman Empire was under severe pressure on the Greek mainland, and in 1821 full-scale revolution, the **Greek War of Independence**, broke out. Part of the Turkish response was to call on the pasha of Egypt, **Mehmet Ali**, for assistance: his price was control of Crete. By 1824, in a campaign which even by Cretan standards was brutal on both sides, he had crushed the island's resistance. When in 1832 an independent Greek state was finally established with the support of Britain, France and Russia, Crete was left in the hands of the Egyptians, reverting to Turkish control within ten years.

From now on guerrilla warfare in support of union with Greece – **énosis** – was almost constant, flaring occasionally into wider revolts but mostly taking the form of incessant raids and irritations. The Cretans enjoyed widespread support, not only on the Greek mainland but throughout western Europe, and especially among expatriate Greek communities. But the Greeks alone were no match for the Ottoman armies, and the Great Powers, wary more than anything of each other, consistently failed to intervene. There was a major rising in 1841, bloodily suppressed, and in 1858 another which ended relatively peacefully in the recall of the Turkish governor and some minor concessions to the Christian population.

In 1866 a Cretan Assembly meeting in Sfakiá declared independence and union with Greece, and Egyptian troops were recalled to put down a further wave of revolts bolstered by Greek volunteers. Again the Egyptians proved ruthlessly effective, but this campaign ended in the explosion at **Arkádhi** (see p.248), an act of defiance which aroused Europe-wide sympathy. The Great Powers – Britain above all – still refused to involve themselves, but privately the supply of arms and volunteers to the insurgents was redoubled. From now on some kind of solution seemed inevitable, but even in 1878 the Congress of Berlin left Crete under Turkish dominion, demanding only further reforms in the government. In 1889 and 1896 there were further violent encounters, and in 1897 a Greek force landed to annexe the island. Finally, the Great Powers were forced into action, occupying Crete with an international force and dividing the island into areas controlled by the British, French, Russians and Italians.

Independence and union with Greece

The outrage which finally brought about the expulsion of Turkish troops from Crete in 1898 was a minor skirmish in Iráklion (see p.81) which led to the death of the British vice-consul. A **national government** was set up, still nominally under Ottoman suzerainty, with Prince George, younger son of King George of Greece, as high commissioner: under him was a joint Muslim-Christian assembly, part elected, part appointed.

Euphoria at independence was muted, however, for full union with Greece remained the goal of most Cretans. A new leader of this movement rapidly emerged – **Eleftheríos Venizélos**. Born at Mourniés, outside Haniá, Venizélos had fought in the earlier independence struggles and become a member of the Cretan Assembly and minister of justice to Prince George. Politically, however, he had little in common with his new master, and in 1905 he summoned an illegal Revolutionary Assembly at Thériso. Though the attempt to take up arms was summarily crushed, the strength of support for Venizélos was enough to force the resignation of Prince George. In 1908, the Cretan Assembly unilaterally declared *énosis* – much to the embarrassment of the Greek government. For, meantime, the "Young Turk" revolution looked set to revitalize the Ottoman Empire, and the Great Powers remained solidly opposed to anything that might upset the delicate balance of power in the Balkans.

The failure of the Greek government to act decisively in favour of Crete was one of the factors that led to the Military League of young officers forcing political reform on the mainland. With their backing, Venizélos became premier of Greece in 1910. In 1912 Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria declared war on the Ottoman Empire, making spectacular advances into Turkish territory. By the peace of 1913, Crete finally and officially became part of the Greek nation.

Though Greece was politically riven by **World War I**, and succeeding decades saw frequent, sometimes violent changes of power between Venizélist and Royalist forces, Crete was little affected. On just one further occasion did the island play a significant role in Greek affairs before the outbreak of war in 1940: in July 1938 there was a popular uprising against the dictator Metáxas and in favour of Venizélos, but it was swiftly put down.

The island was, however, hit hard by the aftermath of the disastrous Greek attempt to conquer Istanbul in pursuit of the "Great Idea" of rebuilding the Byzantine Empire. As part of the peace settlement which followed this military debacle, there was a forced **exchange of populations** in 1923: Muslims were expelled from Greece and Orthodox Christians from Turkey. In Crete many of these "Turks" were in fact Muslim Cretans, descendants of the mass apostasies of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless they left – some thirty thousand in all – and a similar number of Christian refugees from Turkey took their place.

World War II and occupation

In the winter of 1940 Italian troops invaded northern Greece, only to be thrown back across the Albanian border by the Greek army. Mussolini's humiliation, however, only served to draw the Germans into the fight, and although an Allied army was sent to Greece, the **mainland** was rapidly overrun.

The Allied campaign was marked from the start by suspicion, confusion and lack of communication between the two commands. On the Greek side Metáxas had died in January, and his successor as premier committed suicide, leaving a Cretan – **Emanuel Tsouderós** – to organize the retreat of king and government to his native island. They were rapidly followed by thousands of evacuees, including the bulk of the Allied army, a force made up in large part of Australian and New Zealand soldiers. Most of the native Cretan troops, a division of the Greek army, had been wiped out in defence of the mainland.

According to the Allied plan, Crete should by now have been an impregnable fortress. In practice, though, virtually nothing had been done to improve the island defences, there were hardly any serviceable planes or other heavy equipment, and the arriving troops found little in the way of a plan for their deployment.

On May 20, 1941 the **invasion** of the island began, as German troops poured in by glider and parachute. It was at first a horrible slaughter, with the invaders easily picked off as they drifted slowly down. Few of the first wave of parachutists reached the ground alive and many of the gliders crashed, while the main German force was smashed before it ever reached the ground. In the far west, however, beyond the main battle zone, they succeeded in taking the airfield at Máleme. Whether through incompetence (as much of the literature on the Battle of Crete suggests) or breakdown of communications, no attempt to recapture the field was made until the Germans had had time to defend it and, with a secure landing site, reinforcements and equipment began to pour in. Not long before the battle, the German codes had been cracked, and the Allied commander in Crete, General Freyberg, therefore knew in detail exactly where and how the attacks would come. Whether because he didn't trust the information, however, or because of the need to keep secret the intelligence breakthrough, he did not redeploy his troops. From now on the battle, which had seemed won, was lost, and the Allied troops, already under constant air attack, found themselves outgunned on land too.

Casualties of the **Battle of Crete** were horrendous on both sides – the cemeteries are reminiscent of the burial grounds of World War I victims in northern France – and the crack German airborne division was effectively wiped out, causing a devastated Hitler to erect the monument to it which still stands outside Haniá. No one ever attempted a similar assault again. But once they were established with a secure bridgehead, the Germans advanced rapidly, and a week after the first landings the Allied army was in full retreat across the mountains towards Hóra Sfakíon, from where most were evacuated by ship to Egypt. On May 30, the battle was over, leaving behind several thousand Allied soldiers (and all the Cretans who had fought alongside them) to surrender or take to the mountains.

The resistance

One of the first tasks of **the resistance** was to get these stranded soldiers off the island, and in this they had remarkable success, organizing the fugitives into groups and arranging their collection by ship or submarine from isolated beaches on the south coast. Many were hidden and fed by monks while they waited to escape, most famously at the monastery of Préveli. In this and many other ways the German occupation closely mirrored earlier ones; opposition was constant and reprisals brutal. The north coast and the lowlands were, as in the past, easily and firmly controlled, but the mountains, and Sfakiá above all, remained the haunt of rebel and resistance groups throughout the war.

With the boats which took the battle survivors away from Crete came intelligence officers whose job it was to organize and arm the resistance; throughout the war there were a dozen or so on the island, living in mountain shelters or caves, attempting to organize parachute drops of arms and reporting on troop movements on and around the island.

How effective the sporadic efforts of the resistance were is hard to gauge: they had one spectacular success when in 1944 they kidnapped the German commander **General Kreipe** outside Iráklion, and succeeded in smuggling him across to the south coast and off the island to Egypt. Among this group were the authors Patrick Leigh Fermor and Stanley Moss (whose *Ill Met by Moonlight* describes the incident in detail). The immediate result of this propaganda coup, however, was a terrible vengeance against the Cretan population, in which a string of villages around the Amári valley were destroyed and such menfolk as could be found, slaughtered. Harsh **retribution** against Cretan civilians, indeed, was the standard reaction to any success the resistance had.

At the end of 1944, the German forces withdrew to a heavily fortified perimeter around Haniá, where they held out for a final seven months before surrendering. In the rest of the island, this left a **power vacuum** which several of the resistance groups rushed to fill. Allied intelligence would no doubt claim that one of the achievements of their agents in Crete was the near-avoidance of the civil war that wracked the rest of Greece. On the mainland the organization of the resistance had been very largely the work of Greek Communists, who emerged at the end of the war as much the best organized and armed group. On Crete, groups in favour with the Allies had been the best armed and organized, and certainly in the latter stages of the war, Communist-dominated organizations had been deliberately starved of equipment. There were only a few, minor incidents of violence on the island, and these were swiftly suppressed.

Postwar and modern Crete

In avoiding the civil war, Crete was able to set about **reconstruction** some way in advance of the rest of Greece, and since 1945 it has become one of the most prosperous and productive regions of the nation. The really spectacular changes, however, date from the last thirty years, fuelled above all by a tidal wave of tourism.

Politically, postwar Crete remains deeply mistrustful of outside control, even from Athens. At the local level above all, loyalties are divided along clan and patronage lines rather than party political ones, and leaders are judged on how well they provide for their areas and their followers. This was exemplified by the Cretan **Konstantine Mitsotákis**, former head of the right-wing Néa Dhimokratía (ND) party and prime minister until his defeat by PASOK (the socialist party) in the 1993 election: many islanders respected his ability to get things done on Crete even if his party was not much liked.

Cretan politicians at the local level (there is no overall island government, only a regional **administration** controlled by appointees from Athens) continue to take an almost universal joy in standing up to central authority. In one famous incident the mayor of Iráklion organized a sit-in at the Archeological Museum to prevent artworks being taken abroad for an exhibition: fifty thousand turned out to support him, and though President Karamanlís ordered his arrest, the national government was eventually forced to back down.

Rivalries within Crete are fierce, too, most notably between Haniá, which was nominated as capital for a short period at the beginning of the century, and Iráklion, the traditional and present capital and nowadays the richer and politically more important city. This factionalism results in all sorts of anomalies and compromises:

symptomatic was the rather impractical decision to spread the University of Crete across three campuses, at Iráklion, Réthimnon (which has always considered itself the most cultured town in Crete) and the autonomous polytechnic of Haniá.

In **national politics**, the island presents a more unified front as the upholder of the liberal tradition of Venizélos. After the overthrow of the Colonels in 1974, Crete voted heavily against a restoration of the monarchy and for a republican system; in the presidential election that followed, support for the right-winger Karamanlís was less than half as strong on Crete as it was in the rest of Greece. This has been an abiding pattern: PASOK has consistently polled twice as many Cretan votes as ND.

Increasingly, however, the hold of the powerful old families (Mitsotákis is a member of one such long-established clan) and traditional loyalties are crumbling as their power-broking becomes less effective. The day-to-day reality of control from Athens cannot be denied even by the most fervent Cretan nationalist. It first flexed its muscles under the Colonels, when the major tourist developments got underway, brushing aside local qualms over planning or the desirability of mass tourism. Nowadays the EU, through directives and grants, also affects Crete in a major way – above all its farmers – through the Common Agricultural Policy. But central power and the increasing importance of issues over personalities perhaps manifests itself most clearly in the military sphere.

Crete is home to a major American base at Sóudha which monitors all communications in the Middle East zone for the Pentagon and played a significant role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It is one of the few Mediterranean military ports capable of harbouring US aircraft carriers, and local activists believe it is also used to store **nuclear weapons**. The missile base on the nearby Akrotíri peninsula is the chief suspect – its missiles (you can see them test-firing most Wednesdays) are certainly capable of carrying nuclear warheads. As well as the extensive naval installations, Sóudha also holds the US Marine Corps Mediterranean ammunition store, located in submarine pens. On a slightly crazier level, Crete is earmarked as a potential emergency landing site for the **space shuttle**. None of this is popular locally, and again the extent of it is a legacy of the Colonels: the Americans are singled out as the butt of most protests because of their part in the 1967 coup and their role (or lack of one) in the Cyprus affair. Crete's all-too-recent history of military occupation does nothing to make the presence of foreign troops easier, and US navy crews on R&R in Haniá are frequently involved in street battles with local youths.

Andreas Papandreou's PASOK, which won sixty percent of the total Cretan vote in 1985, promised that all US bases in Greece would be closed by 1988. In 1993 the base at Goúrnes near Iráklion shut down but there seems little prospect of all the bases closing: too much has been invested. Around a billion dollars annually in rent and military aid is hard to give up, to say nothing of the other pressures applied. Above all is the fear that if they were thrown out, both bases and aid would simply be transferred to Turkey. But at least plans for expansion seem to have been shelved: there was to have been another base on the Messará plain, possibly at Timbáki where the Germans had a big wartime base and which operates as a Greek military airport; new barracks were built but never occupied. The airport and coastline here have now been incorporated into a controversial plan to turn Timbáki into one of the Mediterranean's largest container transit ports which – should it happen – will utterly transform this area of southern Crete.

Into the new millennium

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Crete shared in the Greek and European economic downturn as a split developed between state employees (of which there are two-thirds more than in any other EU country) and the Mitsotákis government, armed with a Thatcherite austerity programme to cut public expenditure. Strikes and mass protests ended with Néa Dhimokratía's crushing defeat in the general election of October 1993, and the return to power of a **PASOK government**, still led by the ageing and ailing Andreas Papandreou. The austerity programme of Mitsotákis was halted, but as Papandreou's health deteriorated there came no answers as to how the nation with the lowest productivity, highest inflation and largest external debt in the EU was to raise its living standards, a major election promise. The political crisis was compounded when the 76-year-old prime minister fell ill again at the end of 1995 and reluctantly resigned in January 1996 to be succeeded by **Kóstas Simitis**. Five months later, Papandreou was dead; his demise was described by the Greek press as the end of the reign of the dinosaurs – the geriatric politicians who had ruled Greece since the end of the Colonels' regime.

The rather dull technocrat Simitis surprised many by leading PASOK to another victory in the general election of 1996. Fuelled by a desire to take Greece into the EU mainstream, in the years after becoming premier, Simitis attempted to overturn the "gravy train" politics of Papandreou to make another assault on the bloated public sector in order to meet the Maastricht criteria for monetary union. This goal was successfully achieved in 1999 when – after initial reluctance due to the state of the Greek economy – the European Central Bank allowed Greece to be included among the first wave of countries adopting a **single currency**, and the drachma was replaced by the **euro** in 2002. Simitis's fortunes had also been given a boost when, in late 1997, the IOC awarded the **2004 Olympic Games** to Athens and Greece. As a result, enormous funds flooded into the country and some of the EU's biggest infrastructure projects got under way, which catapulted much of the country's transportation system straight from the nineteenth into the twenty-first century, with new railways, roads and airports such as the one at Sitía in eastern Crete.

Riding this wave, Simitis won another **election** victory in the spring of 2000, although by an even narrower margin than his earlier victory of 1996. It was the tightest race since the restoration of democracy in 1974, with a majority of a mere 11,000 votes nationwide separating Simitis's PASOK and the conservative Néa Dhimokratía. Despite the narrow victory in an election that PASOK had been expected to lose, Simitis claimed that the poll victory was an endorsement of his pro-European modernizing policies and the drive towards a rapprochement with Turkey.

Simitis maintained the country on a relatively even keel following his election victory but angered PASOK's paymasters, the unions, with a programme to hit at restrictive practices and a reform of the pensions system. When, under pressure, he watered down these proposals he caught flak from a business lobby convinced state finances were again about to career out of control. During 2003 a general malaise on the part of the electorate, fuelled by a stagnant economy and a string of corruption scandals involving the ruling party, saw a rise in support for **Costas Karamanlís**, the Néa Dhimokratía leader (and nephew and namesake of the 1970s prime minister), who overtook Simitis in the opinion polls for the first time.

Smelling almost certain defeat in the spring election of 2004, PASOK's power brokers pressured Simitis into announcing that he would stand aside in favour of foreign minister **Yiorgos (George) Papandreou**, the son of the party's founder. Born in America and educated in Sweden and Britain, the open-minded, innovative and mild-mannered Papandreou was single-handedly responsible for improving relations with Turkey and impressed young voters by backing causes such as the decriminalization of cannabis. However, his obvious charisma was not enough to destabilize the Néo Dhimokratía bandwagon – in a decisive **electoral victory**

ND leader Costas Karamanlís became at 47 Greece's youngest ever prime minister. The majority of poorer voters seems to have concluded that the PASOK years in power had hugely benefited fat-cat property developers, builders and professional classes who had all cashed in on the Olympics construction boom, while little of this wealth had passed down to them. Add in a grumbling discontent with low salaries, steeply rising prices (popularly attributed to the arrival of the euro) and failing public services, and the causes of PASOK's defeat become clearer. Despite a nationwide swing to the right, Crete once again stayed loyal to the PASOK cause with the socialist party polling forty percent more votes across the island than its ND rival.

The Karamanlís government has proved little more successful than its predecessors in dealing with the economy and rising unemployment. The after effects of gigantic Olympic spending, and Greece's joining the euro at too high a rate after rigging its accounts, were felt in the spring of 2005 when trade unions launched a wave of 24-hour strikes across the country in protest at high inflation and rising unemployment. Attempts to drive through a new labour and pension reform incurred the wrath of the unions, who launched a further wave of **industrial action** throughout the summer. During the same period the Greek parliament **ratified the EU Constitution**, but this was rendered moribund by its rejection in referendums in larger EU states. A similar pattern continued throughout 2006, with a failing education system coming under heavy opposition fire. As the Karamanlís administration moves towards a **general election** to be held in the autumn of 2007 or early in 2008 its platform is based on further curbs on public spending and putting through a major **privatization programme** to include the state-owned telecommunications company OTE, the ailing Olympic Airways plus privatization of some universities. All are controversial and will unavoidably entail further battles with state employees, trade unions and other vested interests.

The island's future

As falling prices for Crete's major agricultural products – olive oil, raisins and citrus fruits – contribute less to the island's prosperity, a greater dependence on tourism has come to the fore. But the age of mass-market **tourism** is beginning to pall as the attractions of sun, beach and cheap booze along much of the coast attract mainly younger holidaymakers, who tend to move on when prices rise. There is also a dawning realization that whilst the island has until recently been winning the "numbers war" in terms of the legions of package tourists who visit, a considerable price has been paid in terms of environmental damage as natural resources and infrastructure are stretched to breaking point in high summer.

As package tourist numbers have declined in the early years of the new millennium, efforts to build a market in **green tourism** are in their infancy, held back by an indifference to environmental concerns by politicians, farmers and a populace which has yet to realize that environmentally organized tourism – for which the island, with its extended season, picturesque landscape and rich variety of flora and fauna is an ideal location – can be enormously profitable. The creation of an autonomous Cretan tourist authority in 2000 with a brief to promote the island should also have been a force for change, but a lack of funding by Athens has left it hamstrung.

Also, for too long Cretans have adopted a part-time approach to the tourist industry – treating it as a summer sideline before returning to the farm to get in the olive and fruit harvests in the winter. This has led, barring a few commendable exceptions, to a lack of professionalism and consequent low standards in food, hotel management and tourist development, all areas where training and career possibilities are minimal or nonexistent.

The island has faced up to invaders throughout its history, but the tourist invasion presents it with a new dilemma: to submerge its traditional ways in the pursuit of ever greater numbers or to try to raise the quality of its tourism and at the same time preserve Crete's unique character. The government in Athens has sent conflicting messages to the island in recent years: on the one hand encouraging the Cretan authorities to do more to cater to ramblers, birdwatchers, naturalists and those interested in the island's archeology and history, on the other stating that funds would be available to support the development of conference centres (with golf courses attached), luxury hotels and casinos. This has led to a British consortium buying a large area of land at the eastern end of the island on Cape Síderos with plans to build a 7000-room resort complex with three golf courses and the inevitable conference centre; other companies are carrying out surveys elsewhere. How Crete tackles these challenges in the years ahead will significantly determine the island's economic and social prosperity well into the new millennium.

Chronology

6000–2600 BC ▸ **Stone Age**

2600–2000 BC ▸ **Pre-Palatial**

2000–1700 BC▸ **A Proto-Palatial**

Evidence of a more formally structured society. First palaces built at most of the famous sites.

1700 BC Earthquake destroys the palaces.

1700–1450 BC ▸ **Neo-Palatial**

1450 BC Final destruction of the palaces.

1450–1100 BC ▸ **Post-Palatial**

Gradual revival under Mycenaean influence. Many earlier sites reoccupied. Kydonia the island's chief city. Eteo-Cretans keep Minoan culture alive at Présos and Karfí. Mycenaean control giving way to Dorian.

1100–67 BC ▸ **Dorian and Classical**

Island divided between rival groups, gradually emerging as constantly warring city-states. Dozens of small towns: Láto, Falásarna, along the south coast, Knossós and Górtys.

300 BC Cities on south coast form Confederation of Oreoi.

71 BC Failed Roman invasion.

69–67 BC Romans subjugate the island.

67 BC–395 AD ▸ **Roman**

Górtys the chief Roman city. Others include Lyttos, Áptera, Knossós. Public works across the island.

395 AD Empire split.

395–824 ▸ **Byzantine**

Crete ruled from Byzantium.

Traces of early churches at Górtys, Soúyia, Thrónos.

824 Arab invasion

824–961 ▸ Arab

Górtys sacked; al-Khandak, later Iráklion, the Arab base.

961 Liberation by Nikifóras Fokás.

961–1204 ▸ Byzantine

Small churches built throughout Crete.

1204 Fourth Crusade, Byzantium sacked, Crete sold to Venice.

1204–1669 ▸ Venetian

Very extensive building. Early remains are mostly in the form of churches and monasteries; later works include the shape of most major towns and defences all over the island: eg at Iráklion, Réthimnon and Haniá; castles include Frangokástello and the fortified islets.

1453 Fall of Constantinople, renaissance of Byzantine art on Crete.

1645 Turks capture Haniá.

1669 Iráklion surrenders.

1669–1898 ▸ Turkish

Mosques and fountains in the cities, especially Haniá and Réthimnon, but few public works undertaken in the rest of the island.

1770 Revolt of Dhaskaloyiánnis.

1821 Greek War of Independence.

1866 Explosion at Arkádhi.

1897 Great Powers occupy Crete.

1898 Independence under Prince George.

1898–1913 ▸ Independence

1905 Revolutionary Assembly at Thériso, prince abdicates.

1908 Crete declares *énosis*.

1913 Union of Greece and Crete formally declared.

1913–present day ▸ Modern Crete

1941 German invasion.

1945 Liberation.

1960s Tourist boom starts.

1967–74 Dictatorship of the Colonels.

1986 Greece becomes full member of the EU.

1999 Greece joins eleven other EU states in creating the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and a single currency, the euro.

2001 The drachma is replaced by the euro as Greece's official currency.

2004 Athens stages Olympic Games. Some events held in Crete. Crete along with the rest of Greece celebrates the remarkable victory of the national team in the European Championship football tournament in Portugal.

The discovery of Bronze Age Crete

The story of the discovery of Bronze Age Crete – dominated by two larger-than-life characters in Heinrich Schliemann and Arthur Evans – is almost as fascinating as that of the Minoans themselves. Long before the appearance of these two giants, however, others had taken soundings and laid the foundations for their discoveries.

Already ancient in antiquity, Crete had disappeared into the mists of Greek mythology and Homeric legend, and it was only during the Venetian period that curiosity about the island's illustrious past was reawoken. In 1422 a Florentine monk, **Buondelmonte**, visited Crete and reported that he had seen over two thousand columns and statues at Górtys. More monuments and inscriptions were recorded by **Honorio de Belli** in 1596. In 1675, the Dutchman **Johann Meursius**, in his book *Creta*, sifted through the Classical references relating to the island.

In 1717 a French explorer and botanist, **Joseph Tournefort**, described Crete in his *Voyage au Levant*; the English navigator **Richard Pococke** also took an interest, documenting his findings in the second volume of his *Description of the East* published in 1745. But these were largely superficial observations, and early in the nineteenth century it fell to another Dutchman, **Karl Hoeck** (who never actually visited the island), to write the first scholarly account of ancient Crete.

The nineteenth century: travellers and tradition

A more genuinely first-hand record, and the best description of Crete's monuments and sites so far, was provided by Cambridge scholar **Robert Pashley** who, in the early 1830s, travelled extensively throughout the island; it must have been a rugged journey. Pashley allied a Classical education with a keen eye, and had an uncanny knack for identifying ancient sites, written up in his entertaining *Travels in Crete* (1837). A century later, Pendlebury, the eminent British archeologist, paid Pashley fulsome tribute when he credited the traveller-scholar with identifying most of the important Cretan sites, including Knossós.

It was probably as well for those who were to come after him that it never occurred to Pashley to take up the spade. That he came near to doing so is borne out by his prophetic comments on Knossós: "The mythological celebrity and historical importance of Cnossus, demand a more careful and minute attention than can be bestowed on them in a mere book of travels."

During the years 1851–53 **Captain Spratt** (later Admiral) surveyed the Cretan coastline for the British admiralty. Taking an interest in the island's archeological remains, Spratt imperiously shipped quite a few of these back to the British Museum – often against the wishes of the local population. In an attempt to move a stone sarcophagus on board ship at Ierápetra he describes how one of his officers had to sleep in the sculptured coffin on the beach overnight "…to prevent it being injured wantonly or by local enemies (there were a party there who were opposed to our removal of the relic)… yet it did not wholly escape mischief, for some wanton hand destroyed what remained of the face of Hector."

Spratt also studied the island's natural history and geology, and it was the latter pursuit which earned him a footnote in Cretan archeology. His work for the British navy enabled him to demonstrate that, as a result of a geological convulsion in the sixth century AD, the whole island had been tilted upwards at its western end by as much as 8m, while the eastern end had sunk down. Spratt was probably wrong about the cause, but his observations remain valid, the tilting being clearly evident in the marshy swamps at the eastern site of Zákros.

The age of Schliemann

None of these early visitors to Crete, however, was concerned with pre-Classical history. The discovery of the great Bronze Age Minoan civilization was the almost single-handed achievement of Arthur Evans.

An important clue had been found as early as 1878. Digging at Knossós, a Cretan merchant, with the appropriate name of **Minos Kalokairinos**, had uncovered a number of large storage jars mixed in with Mycenaean pottery fragments – something that was to confuse later investigators. This find attracted the attention of **Heinrich Schliemann**, who had already excited world interest by his excavation of ancient **Troy** in northwest Turkey, followed by the fortresses at **Mycenae** and **Tiryns** in the Greek Peloponnese. The son of a poor German pastor who filled his head with the fabulous tales of Homeric Greece, Schliemann left school without completing his studies, to set up in business. In the course of a highly successful commercial career in which he amassed a fortune based on military contracts in the Crimean war and participation in the California gold rush, Schliemann never lost sight of the goal that he had set himself as a boy: to prove that the world of Homer was not mere myth as the majority of scholars then believed, and to discover the fabulous places mentioned in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

When he finally embarked on this quest in his late forties, Schliemann taught himself Latin and Greek, which he used to dissect his Homer before setting out for Turkey and then Greece. To the chagrin of the professional classicists, he was later to claim that it was a thorough reading of Homer which had led him to his discoveries. In fact, Schliemann became so besotted with his Hellenic vision that he not only took a Greek wife, but did so after a public competition in which the celebrated archeologist offered his hand in marriage to the first Greek girl who was able to render a faultless recitation of the entire *Iliad* from memory. Given Schliemann's luck it was inevitable that the first woman to achieve this feat was also an outstanding beauty; **Sofia Schliemann** became as enthusiastic as her husband in the pursuit of Greece's Bronze Age past.

Schliemann arrived in Crete in 1887, made a visit to the site at Knossós, and became convinced that a substantial palace, equivalent to those he had discovered on the mainland, lay waiting to be unearthed. But Crete was still under the subjection of Turkey, and the authorities were often indolent and obstructive. In addition, when he attempted to negotiate the purchase of some land at Knossós, the Turkish owners proved impossible to deal with and finally, with his patience exhausted and his health declining, Schliemann departed. A chill, caught after an ear operation in Naples, led to his sudden death in 1890. It was this twist of fortune which was destined to make Arthur Evans the discoverer of Knossós and Minoan Crete.

The first excavations

Meanwhile, others had also begun to take an interest in the island's past. During the twilight period of Turkish rule there was some relaxation of the iron grip, and the sultan gave permission to a Cretan archeologist, **Joseph Hatzidhákis**, to set up the **Cretan Archeological Society**, the forerunner of the Iráklion Archeological Museum. In 1884 an Italian scholar arrived in Crete, became friends with Hatzidhákis, and the two men began to search for ancient sites.

The scholar was **Federico Halbherr**, whose name was also destined to become prominent in Cretan archeology. It was on one of their expeditions in 1885 that the first recorded discovery of Bronze Age artefacts was made at the **Psihró Cave** above the Lasíthi plateau. The following year the chance unearthing of a tomb near **Festós** gave Halbherr the idea that there was probably a settlement nearby. Preliminary excavations revealed substantial buildings as well as prehistoric pottery, but the political turmoil leading up to the end of Turkish rule postponed further progress.

Another important clue to what was to come had also been found on the volcanic island of **Thíra** in the 1860s. During quarrying operations for the enormous amounts of pumice needed to make cement for the construction of the Suez Canal, a buried settlement was revealed. Here whole rooms had been preserved intact, their walls covered with remarkable fresco paintings. Although it is now understood to be a colony or outpost of Minoan civilization, this was long before any comparable Minoan remains had been discovered on Crete itself.

Arthur Evans

In 1882 a meeting occurred at one of Athens' most elegant mansions which was to have an enormous importance for Cretan archeology. The host was the famous archeologist Heinrich Schliemann, his guest a young scholar and journalist – **Arthur Evans**. Born in 1851, the son of a wealthy and distinguished numismatist, Evans's upbringing could hardly have differed more from that of the self-made German businessman. Educated at Harrow and then Oxford, Evans was always to have the time and the financial security to pursue his interests wherever they might lead him.

Schliemann was digging again at Troy and regaled his guest with the story of his excavations both there and at Mycenae. But Evans displayed more interest in Schliemann's extensive collection of ancient artefacts, particularly some **engraved seals** bearing an octopus design which he felt must be of Aegean, possibly Cretan, origin. Schliemann then announced to Evans that his next project was to be the excavation of another Mycenaean fortress at Tiryns, following which he would dig at the site in Crete from where, as Homer put it in the *Iliad*, "came forth the men from Knossós". Little can he have realized the frustration of this goal that lay ahead, or that his attentive guest would himself be the recipient of this great archeological prize.

For the time being Evans returned to England to take up a post as keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, although he continued to pay visits to the Balkans and Greece. Evans's studies during this period, allied to the discovery of more seal stones bearing **pre-alphabetical writing**, led him to the proposition that Crete had been an important centre of Mycenaean culture, possibly even its birthplace. When, in 1893, a great hoard of **painted pottery** was discovered by Italian archeologists at the **Kamáres Cave** on Mount Ida (Psiloritis), Evans's mind was made up: he would visit Crete to search for more seal stones and, if circumstances allowed, make a fresh attempt to carry out the excavations at Knossós which had been denied to Schliemann.

Evans arrived in Crete for the first time on March 15, 1894. Typically, in spite of an horrendously rough voyage from Pireás lasting 24 hours, no sooner had he set foot on the island than, he recorded in his diary, he toured the Candia bazaar and purchased "twenty-two early Cretan stones at about one and a half piastres apiece". Evans had started out as he meant to continue and, once the initial obstacles had been overcome, the pace was hardly to slacken over the next thirty years.

With the assistance of **Joseph Hatzidhákis**, now curator as well as president of the Cretan Archeological Society, Evans began to negotiate for the purchase of the land at Knossós with its Turkish owners. He became bogged down in the same protracted wrangles that had forced Schliemann to despair. But Evans was a man who usually got what he wanted. Even so it took five years, some valiant efforts from Hatzidhákis and a great stroke of luck in the lifting in 1898 of the Turkish yoke which had burdened Crete for 230 years. Evans, possessing a liberal political outlook, had worked with Hatzidhákis to raise funds in Britain and Crete for the victims of the insurrections during this period. Finally the major obstacle to starting excavations at Knossós had been removed.

Knossós: the early years

In 1899 the new government changed the law and most of the restrictions on foreign excavators were cleared away. Evans's purchase of the land at **Knossós** went through and work started on March 23, 1900; interestingly for the future, the team that Evans assembled for the dig included an architect, **Theodore Fyfe**, from the British School at Athens. As the excavations progressed Evans soon realized that he was dealing with a site far older than the Roman, Greek or even Mycenaean periods. Then out of the earth came **frescoes**, **pottery** and what came to be known as **Linear B** tablets bearing the ancient Minoan script. On April 10 the Throne Room was discovered with its elegant **gypsum throne** – named at first the "throne of Ariadne" by Evans who thought it too dainty to hold the manly posterior of Minos himself – flanked by stone benches and frescoed walls.

During the first five years of the excavations, in which most of the palace was revealed, Evans made a number of innovations. In his magisterial style he named the new civilization **Minoan** after the legendary Cretan king. He then proceeded to delineate his division of the island's Bronze Age into Early, Middle and Late Minoan based on pottery styles found at Knossós: **Early Minoan** 3000–2000 BC; **Middle Minoan I & II** 2000–1700 BC; **Middle Minoan III & Late Minoan I & II** 1700–1400 BC; and **Late Minoan III** 1400–1100 BC. In spite of problems later encountered with this system – for example, not all contemporary sites went through the same artistic developments in similar timescales – Evans's system remains the one used by archeologists and scholars, if only because no one has yet bettered it.

Restoration and controversy

Another of Evans's early decisions was to prove far more controversial: he determined that he would not only reveal the palace of Minos but that he would also **restore** large parts of it (he insisted on the word "reconstitute") to the splendour prior to its final destruction around 1400 BC. That Evans was able autocratically to decide this rested on his personal ownership of one of the major sites of antiquity – something that would be unthinkable today. "I must have sole control of what I am personally undertaking… my way may not be the best but it is the only way I can work," he wrote revealingly to his father.

What Evans had now embarked upon was one of the most expensive enterprises in the history of archeology, and in the early years funds were often stretched. But fortunately or otherwise for Knossós – depending on your viewpoint – two large legacies fell into Evans's lap eight years into the mammoth task, as a result of the deaths of both his father and his uncle (John Dickinson, the paper millionaire) within months of each other in 1908. Evans's plans for Knossós, destined to last for a further 23 years, were now financially secure.

With the assistance of architects Theodore Fyfe and later **Piet de Jong**, Evans first roofed the Throne Room and then reconstructed the **grand staircase**, replacing the **tapered columns** with his speculative concrete reconstructions (none of the wooden originals was ever found). Two Swiss artists then began to repaint the reconstructed walls with copies of the **frescoes** now in the Iráklion Archeological Museum. In 1930 the almost entirely conjectural upper storey (or **Piano Nobile** as Evans fancifully termed it) was added, using reinforced concrete. Next, the **Central Court** was extensively restored as the archeological site became a building site. Evans attempted to deflect criticism of his methods as he imposed his own grand design on the work of architects and artists by saying that he wanted to re-create the "spirit" of the palace structure and decor rather than create a literal reconstruction. This was where many scholars parted company with him. Pendlebury, who was to be Evans's successor at Knossós (see p.438), put aside earlier reservations and defended Evans in a guidebook to the site, stating that "without restoration the Palace would be a meaningless heap of ruins". Others furiously disagreed, and the debate is no less heated today. One thing, however, is certain: no professional archeologist would be allowed or would expect to carry out such a work again.

In his views on Minoan scholarship Evans could be equally autocratic and blinkered. When **Alan Wace**, director of the British School at Athens, excavated a number of tombs on the site of Mycenae in the Greek Peloponnese in the early 1920s, his findings led him to conclude that Mycenae had not only been a culture independent of that of Crete – Evans stated that it had been a colony of Crete ruled by Cretan overlords – but that in the later period Mycenaeans had been in control at Knossós. For Evans this was heresy, and he used his considerable influence to attack Wace, get him sacked and stop him carrying out any further work at Mycenae. Evans went to his grave believing he was right, but in the light of the decipherment of Linear B and later investigation, it is Wace's views that are generally accepted today.

The end of an era

During the long periods that Evans spent working at Knossós, he lived in some style at the villa he had constructed for himself overlooking the palace site. The **Villa Ariadne**, as he typically named it, became the focus of scholarly life, if of a slightly stuffy masculine Victorian kind. Evans revelled in the stream of distinguished visitors to Knossós, who were met at the harbour by his chauffeur-driven limousine and then plied with French champagne following a guided tour of the site. His relationship with the Greeks, not to say the native Cretans, seems to have been scratchy by comparison. A crusty, aloof man by nature, he seems never to have been able to relax with them and certainly was never to be seen around a table at the *kafeníon*, as later Pendlebury was. Evans's lack of fluency in modern Greek – in spite of the time he spent on the island – was also taken by many as a sign of his disdain for the degenerate latter-day occupants of such ancient lands.

In 1924 Evans donated the Knossós site and the Villa Ariadne to the British School at Athens – it was only in 1952 that it was to become the property of the Greek government. Coincidentally, on the same day the donation was announced Evans was arraigned before Marlborough Street magistrates' court on a charge of gross indecency with a youth in Hyde Park. In what appears to be an early example of news management, it was the donation rather than the sexual peccadillo that made the front-page in the following day's London *Times*.

Early in the 1930s, and approaching his eightieth year, Evans handed over the reins at Knossós to a young English archeologist, **John Pendlebury**, and retired to his home near Oxford to complete the final volumes of his monumental work *The Palace of Minos*. It was the end of an era. Sir Arthur Evans (as he was now titled) paid his last visit to the site with which his name remains inextricably linked in 1935, when he attended the festivities surrounding the unveiling of his **bronze bust** in the palace grounds. He died six years later, in 1941.

Evans's contemporaries and successors

Although Evans stole the headlines for forty years, much important work was meanwhile being carried out elsewhere. Above all, Federico Halbherr (see p.435) was excavating **Festós** and later **Ayía Triádha**. In 1900, the same year that Evans began digging at Knossós, Halbherr started work on the beautifully situated palace at Festós. He soon acquired legendary status among the country people, thanks to his custom of riding around on a coal-black Arab mare. The bulk of the palace – including a dramatic **staircase** – was laid bare in three seasons of work. Although some restoration was done on the site, it was nothing resembling Evans's efforts at Knossós; in fact Halbherr and his colleagues pursued a far more rigorously scientific excavation, the first carried out on Crete. The Italian School continued its work at Festós, Ayía Triádha and Górtys throughout the century.

In the east **British teams** worked at **Zákros** (where Hogarth narrowly failed to uncover the palace) and the Minoan settlements at **Palékastro** and Présos. John Pendlebury also made a great impression in this period. A man with great affection both for Crete and the Cretans, he covered vast tracts of the island on foot in his search for evidence of ancient sites. He found countless numbers of these and made many friends along the way. Besides his work at Knossós he also excavated the late Minoan refuge at **Karfí** above the Lasíthi plateau. Pendlebury was killed in the early years of World War II, fighting alongside the Cretans during the German attack on Iráklion in 1941. Work by the British School has continued at Knossós as well as more remote sites such as the Minoan settlements at Mírtos Pírgos and Mírtos Foúrnou Korifí.

The **Americans** were also active in eastern Crete from the earliest days of exploration. A woman – in a field dominated by men – staked out her claim at **Gourniá** on the Gulf of Mirabéllo. **Harriet Boyd** (later Mrs Boyd-Hawes), a young classics scholar from Massachusetts, visited Athens in 1900 and was gripped by the excitement surrounding the archeological excavations then getting under way. She went to Crete, received the almost obligatory encouragement from Evans, and the following year set off by donkey for the east with her foreman, the Zorba-like Aristides, and his mother, her constant companions. After a number of false starts she alighted on Gourniá and to her own, and the world's, surprise, there uncovered the workers' village. The telegram she sent to the American Exploration Society, after three days' digging, says it all: "Discovered Gourniá Mycenaean site, streets, houses, pottery, bronzes, stone jars." It was, of course, a Minoan site, but the archeologists were still feeling their way back into a past much more ancient than anyone then realized.

Another skilled American archeologist working in the east was **Richard Seager**. In the early 1900s he excavated the important early Minoan settlement at **Vasilikí**, with its famous pottery, before moving on to the islands of Psíra and then **Móhlos**, where substantial settlements were found. Seager was a good friend of Evans, who attended the funeral following Seager's sudden death at Iráklion in 1925. "He was the most English American I have ever known" was Evans's quintessential epitaph. The North American contribution (now a joint venture with Greek scholars) continues at Móhlos, as well as at **Kómmos**, where Joseph and María Shaw are excavating an impressive Minoan port to the north of Mátala.

The **French** have also contributed some excellent work at **Lató**, **Ítanos** and especially **Mália**. After initial investigations by Joseph Hatzidhákis and during the years of World War I from 1915 on, the French School at Athens were awarded the site in 1922. Having excavated the **Minoan palace** they are now working on unearthing the extensive settlement which surrounded it.

Recent developments: Zákros

The discovery of ancient Crete continued steadily throughout the twentieth century – barring wartime interruptions – if not always as spectacularly as it began. The outstanding exception was **Nikólaos Pláton**'s excavation at **Zákros** which, from 1962 onwards, finally revealed the palace long suspected to have been there. Sixty years earlier Hogarth had missed the palace by a few yards, and in one of his treks around eastern Crete in 1938 the voracious Pendlebury, accompanied by his archeologist wife Hilda, had combed the area. "We must have been sitting on the very site – and we saw nothing," said Hilda Pendlebury later. Fittingly, one of Crete's greatest archeological prizes of all fell to a Cretan.

Prior to Hogarth and Pendlebury, Zákros had also been visited by Captain Spratt in 1852, as well as Halbherr, and Evans himself. **Hogarth** did expose parts of the surrounding settlement, with houses containing rich pottery, clay seals and bronze tools. The site then lay dormant until after World War II. Nikólaos Pláton became convinced that because of the submerged but excellent harbour – in a prime position for trade with the Near East – there had to be a palace here. With funds from the Greek Archeological Society and two wealthy American backers, he started work in 1962 where Hogarth had left off. The **unlooted palace**, never reoccupied after its destruction by fire around 1450 BC, was now revealed, together with a rich yield of artefacts, including over three thousand vases. Pláton continued to supervise the excavations at Zákros until his death in 1992, and work on uncovering the town surrounding the palace is still in progress.

In the recent excavations, Greek and Cretan archeologists have finally been able to play a more equal role than in the early days, when foreign archeological teams often treated them with patronizing high-handedness. Some, like Hatzidhákis and Marinátos, were there from the start but unable to compete with the wealthy foreigners in what was very much a private-enterprise affair. Now, with mainly state funding, Greek archeologists such as **Yannis** and **Efi Sakellarakis** (at Arhánes, Anemóspilia and the Idean Cave), **Davaras** (Móhlos, Psíra and many more), **Rethemiotakis** (Galatás), **Alexiou** (Leben), **Zois** (Vasilikí), **Tzedakis** (Arméni),

Karetsou (Mount Yioúhtas), **Kanta** (Monastiráki) and **Tsipopoulou** (Petrás) are contributing greatly to the island's archeological discoveries. These continue to be added to as each season passes and, although it is unlikely that another Knossós will come to light, there are indications – such as those in the work continuing under **Andreakaki-Vlasaki** at **Haniá** – that many more sites, particularly in the west, lie awaiting the spade.

A once neglected area of Cretan archeology – the **post-Bronze Age**, Dorian and Roman – is also now being given more attention than ever before at sites across the island. These Minoan and post-Minoan sites today stand as a tribute not only to the dedicated archeologists who discovered and exposed them, but also to the work of the nameless thousands of Cretans who laboured with spade, trowel and barrow to uncover the past of their illustrious ancestors.

Crete in myth

Crete is intimately associated with much of ancient Greek mythology, and in particular with Zeus, who was not only brought up on the island, but according to some ancient Cretans was buried here as well. The Dhiktean Cave, a gash on the face of Mount Dhíkti which soars above the Lasíthi plateau, has most claims to be the birthplace of the greatest god in the Greek pantheon, and symbolizes the potent influence of Minoan Crete on the land to the north.

The birth of Zeus

According to the earliest accounts of the myth, **Zeus** was the third generation of rulers of the gods. The original ruler, Uranus, was overthrown by his youngest son Kronos. In order to prevent such a fate overtaking him, too, Kronos ate his first five children at birth. When she was bearing the sixth child, his wife, Rhea, took refuge in a Cretan cavern (a site much argued over, but most commonly assigned to the Dhiktean Cave; see p.174). Here Zeus was born, and in his place Rhea presented Kronos with a rock wrapped in blankets, which he duly devoured. Zeus was brought up secretly in the cave, his cries drowned by the **Kouretes**, who kept up a noisy dance with continuous clashing of shields and spears outside. The Kouretes, believed by Cretans to be the sons of the Earth Mother, were especially revered on the island as the inventors of beekeeping and honey as well as the hunting bow, and an inscription found at Palékastro suggests that they may well have a Minoan origin. The baby fed on milk from a mountain goat-nymph, Amalthea, one of whose horns he later made into a miraculous gift which a wish would fill with whatever was desired (hence the horn of plenty).

Having grown to manhood on Crete, Zeus declared war on Kronos and the Titans, a struggle which lasted ten years. Eventually, however, Zeus emerged as supreme ruler of the gods on **Mount Olympus**, and Kronos was banished to the Underworld. This myth has a precedent in Hittite texts of the second millennium BC which themselves had taken it over from the earlier Hurrians, a people who had settled in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. The Minoans passed it on to the Greeks.

The origin of the Cretans

The sexual prowess of Zeus led him into a bewildering number of affairs, one of which led to his best-known return to the island of his birth – with Europa – and the founding of the Cretan race. **Europa** was a princess, the daughter of King Phoenix (after whom Phoenicia was named), and Zeus lusted after her mightily. Approaching the shore of Phoenicia, Zeus saw her gathering flowers, and came to her in the guise of a **white bull**. Fascinated by the creature's docility Europa climbed onto its back, at which he leapt into the sea and carried her off across the sea to Crete. They landed at Mátala, travelled to Górtys (where one version has it Zeus ravished her beneath a plane tree which has never lost its leaves since) and were married at the Dhiktean Cave. One of the presents of Zeus to his bride was **Talos**, a bronze giant who strode round the island hurling boulders at approaching strangers. Jason and the Argonauts were greeted by a hail of stones from Talos when they approached Crete. Aided by their companion, the sorceress Medea, they brought about the giant's fall by piercing a vein on his ankle – his single vulnerable spot – thus allowing the *ichor*, a divine fluid which served as blood, to drain from his body.

Minos and the Minotaur

The Zeus of the Europa tale, taking the form of a **bull**, is almost certainly mixed up with earlier, native Cretan gods. The sun god of Crete also took the form of a bull, and the animal is a recurrent motif in the island's mythology.

In the story of **Minos**, a bull once again has a prominent role. Europa bore Zeus three sons – Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon – before eventually being abandoned. Later she married the king of Crete, Asterios, who adopted her children. Upon reaching manhood the three brothers quarrelled for the love of a beautiful boy named Miletos (a reflection of the mores and customs of the time). When Miletos chose Sarpedon, an enraged Minos drove him from the island. However, before boarding a ship to Asia Minor, Miletos killed King Asterios. Legend associates both Miletos and Sarpedon – who joined him in Asia Minor – with the founding of Miletus (see p.168), later an important city in Greek and Roman times.

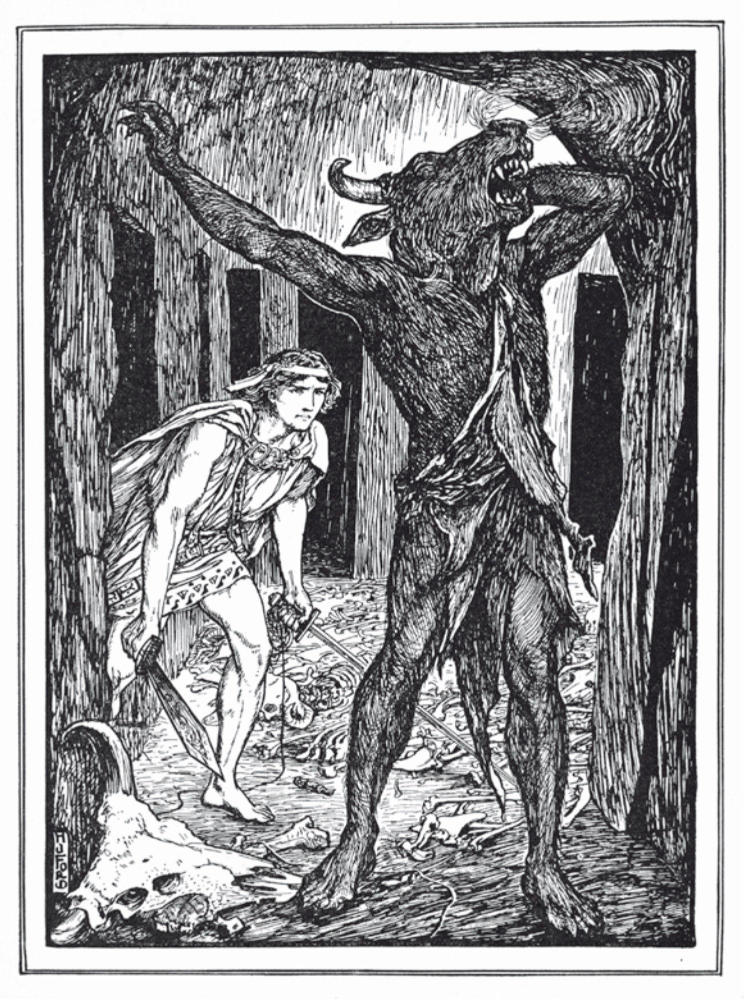
With Sarpedon removed, Minos claimed the throne and settled upon Rhadamanthys a third of Asterios' dominions. Rhadamanthys became renowned as a lawmaker, appears in some tales as ruler at Festós, and every ninth year visited Zeus's cave on Mount Dhíkti to bring back a new set of laws. So great was Rhadamanthys's fame as a lawgiver that Homer tells of how Zeus appointed him one of the three judges of the dead along with Minos and Aeachus.

Minos, meanwhile, was another ruler driven by lustful passions. He liaised with a succession of lovers including the Minoan goddess **Britomartis**, whom he chased relentlessly around the island for nine months until she threw herself into the sea off the end of the Rodhópou peninsula to escape his attentions. Rescued from drowning by the net of a fisherman, she became known as Diktynna ("of the net"), and a great temple to her was erected on the site (see p.340). Minos's wife and queen, **Pasiphae**, incensed by her rakish husband's infidelities, put a spell on the king: whenever he lay with another woman he discharged not seed but a swarm of poisonous serpents, scorpions and insects which devoured the woman's vitals. News of his affliction (which bears a striking resemblance to venereal disease) apparently got around, and one of his bedmates Prokris, daughter of the Athenian king Erechtheus, insisted that he should take a prophylactic draught before their tryst which apparently prevented her invasion by serpents and scorpions.

Earlier, when he had gained the throne of his father, Minos prayed to Poseidon (or perhaps his father Zeus) to send a bull from the sea which he could offer as a sacrifice, thus signifying the god's recognition of the justice of his claim to the throne. When the radiant bull emerged from the sea, Minos was so taken by its beauty that he determined to keep it, sacrificing in its place another from his herds. Punishment for such hubris was inevitable, and in this case the gods chose to inflame Minos's wife, Pasiphae (a moon goddess in her own right – again the bull symbolizes the sun), with intense desire for the animal. She had the brilliant inventor and craftsman **Daedalus** construct her an artificial cow, in which she hid and induced the bull to couple with her: the result was the **Minotaur**, a beast half man and half bull (probably human with a bull's head). To hide his shame, Minos had Daedalus construct the **labyrinth** in which to imprison the monster.

Theseus and Ariadne

Meanwhile Minos had waged war on Athens after Androgeous, one of his sons by Pasiphae, had gone off to that city and won every event in the Panathenaic games, only to be slain on the orders of the outraged Athenian king, Aegeus. Part of the settlement demanded by the victorious Minos was that an annual tribute of seven young men and women be provided as sport or sacrifice for the Minotaur. The third time the tribute was due, **Theseus**, the son of King Aegeus, resolved to



HOW THESEUS SLEW THE MINOTAUR.

end the slaughter and himself went as one of the victims. In Crete he met Minos's daughter **Ariadne**, who fell in love with him and resolved to help him in his task. At the instigation of the sympathetic Daedalus, she provided Theseus with a ball of thread which he could unwind and, if he succeeded in killing the Minotaur, follow to find his way out of the labyrinth.

At first everything went to plan, and Theseus killed the beast and escaped from the island with Ariadne and the others. On the way home though, things were less successful. Ariadne was abandoned on a beach in Náxos (where she was later found by the god Dionysos and carried off to Olympus). Approaching Athens, Theseus forgot to change his black sails for white – the pre-arranged signal that his mission had succeeded. Thinking his son dead, King Aegeus threw himself into the sea and drowned.

Back on Crete, Minos imprisoned Daedalus in his own labyrinth, furious at Ariadne's desertion and his part in it, and at the failure of the maze. Locked up with Daedalus was his son, **Ikarus**. They escaped by making wings of feathers – from birds devoured by the Minotaur – held together with wax. Daedalus finally reached Sicily and the protection of King Kokalos: Ikarus, though, flew too close to the sun, the wax melted and he plunged to his death in the sea. Still set on revenge, Minos tracked Daedalus down by setting a puzzle so fiendishly difficult that only he could have solved it: a large reward was promised to the first person who could pass a thread through a triton shell. When Minos eventually arrived in Sicily he posed the problem to Kokalos who said it would be easy. He then consulted secretly with Daedalus who drilled the shell at its point and tied a thread to the leg of an ant which was sent into the shell. When the insect emerged through the hole, Kokalos took the shell to show Minos. Now certain that Daedalus was hidden in the palace, Minos demanded that Kokalos hand him over. Kokalos appeared to agree to the request and offered Minos hospitality in the palace. There Minos met an undignified end when he was scalded to death in his bath by the daughters of the king, urged on by Daedalus.

The postscript to all this concerns **Zeus's death**. According to the Cretans, and reflecting the older Minoan idea of a fertility god who annually died and was reborn, Zeus was buried beneath Mount Yioúhtas near Knossós, in whose outline his recumbent profile can still be seen from the palace site. It was a purely local claim, however, and clashed with the northern Greek concept of Zeus as an immortal and all-powerful sky-god. The northern Greeks regarded the islanders' belief in a dying Zeus as blasphemy, and their contempt for the Cretan heresy gave rise to the saying "all Cretans are liars".

Wildlife

Although the south coast of Crete is closer to Libya than it is to Athens, the island's wildlife owes much more to mainland Greece than it does to Africa. This is because Crete lies at the end of the long range of drowned limestone mountains called the Hellenic arc which make up most of the Balkan peninsula, and you need to go a long way south into the Sahara before you again find mountains as high as the Cretan ones. Crete, then, has typically northern Mediterranean fauna and flora.

Islands tend to be short on wildlife because of their isolation from the main bulk of species on the mainland. Not so Crete – it's rich in flora and fauna, and provides the full range of Mediterranean habitats. In fact, there are over two thousand species of **plants** in Crete, of which over 180 are endemic to the island, making up nearly a third of the Greek flora, and about as many as in the whole of Britain. This profusion also resulted partly because Crete went relatively unscathed through the Ice Ages, and partly because botanical variety tends to increase the nearer you go to the equator. With the wealth of plant life come far more **insects** than you get further north. The survival of Cretan wildlife in all its richness and diversity has been facilitated by the fact that agriculture remains fairly "undeveloped". Much of the land is steep and rocky with only a thin capping of soil, and you'll see modern intensive agriculture only on the lowland plains – although the pressures are mounting, in the form of widespread use of chemicals, increased water abstraction, road construction and tourist development. You won't find many birds or wildflowers among the hectares of polytunnels around Timbáki, but you will in the mountains where such methods remain uneconomic.

The only feature really lacking, as elsewhere in Greece, is **trees**. The Minoan civilization was a seafaring one, so as early as the Bronze Age there was a high demand for timber for shipbuilding. Some of the lower hills were perhaps deforested four thousand years ago, a process completed by the Venetians. Today, native forests exist only in remote uplands and gorges.

Crete's chief drawback, at least if you hope to combine nature with the rest of the island's sights and life, is the pattern of its **climate**. Because it's so far south, the summers are long and dry, and that period equates to our northern winters, when many plants shut down or die, with a corresponding decline in activity from all other wildlife. Trying to see wildflowers or birds in lowland Crete in August is a bit like going out for a nature ramble in Britain or Massachusetts in January. For flowers, the best time to go is March: the season continues through to late June in the mountains, while around the coasts many plants keep flowering right through the winter.

Habitats

Rarely in Europe do you find such a wide range of habitats so tightly packed, or real "wilderness" areas so close to modern towns and resorts, as in Crete. Broadly speaking, you can divide the island into four major **habitats**: the coast; cultivated land; low hillsides less than 1000m; and mountains above 1000m. Crete is the only Greek island which is mountainous enough to have all four of these habitats.

Along the coast, sandy beaches and low rocky cliffs are the norm. Marshy river deltas or estuaries are rare (simply because Crete is a dry country and there aren't many rivers) but where you can find them, these wetland habitats are among the best places to look for birds.

Cultivated land is very variable in its wildlife interest. Huge wheatfields, or huge olive groves for that matter, have little to offer, but where the pattern is smaller in scale and more varied, it can be very good. This is especially true of the small market gardens – *perivólia* – often found on the edge of towns and villages, which are particularly good for small birds. Small hayfields can be a colourful mass of annual flowers and attendant insects in spring and early summer.

Low hillsides up to 1000m comprise much of Crete. Scrubby hillsides, loosely grazed by goats and sometimes sheep, are the most typical Mediterranean habitat, extremely rich in flowers, insects and reptiles. Botanically, they divide into two distinct types: the first is *phrígana*, the Greek word for the French *garigue*, and consists of scattered scrubby bushes, always on limestone, especially rich in aromatic herbs and wildflowers. You can often find *phrígana* by looking for beehives: Cretan beekeepers know where to find the thyme and rosemary that gives the local honey its wonderful flavour. The other hillside habitat is *maquis*, a dense, very prickly scrub with scattered trees. Of these two hillside habitats, *phrígana* is better for flowers, *maquis* for birds.

Mountains over 1000m are surprisingly common: three separate ranges go over 2000m, and they are responsible for much of the climate, creating rain and retaining it as snow for a large part of the year. The small upland plateaux amongst the mountains – Omalós or Lasíthi most famously – are a very special feature, with their own distinctive flora and fauna. Although the Cretan mountains don't as a rule have the exciting mammals of the mainland, they are very good for large and spectacular birds of prey.

Flowers

What you will see, obviously, depends on where and when you go. The best time is **spring**, which is heralded as early as January when the almond tree flowers, its petals falling like snow and carpeting the streets of small mountain villages. The season seriously gets under way in mid-February, however, in the southeast corner of the island, is at its peak during March over most of the lowlands (but continues well into April), and in the mountains comes later, starting in late April and going on through to June. In **early summer**, the spring anemones, orchids and rockroses are replaced by plants like broom and chrysanthemum; this ranges from mid-April in southern Crete to late July in the high mountains. These timings vary from year to year, too, exceptionally by as much as a month – in early April 1986 it was too hot to lie on the beach at Yeoryioúpolis at midday, but at the same time in 1987 there was snow on the beach at nearby Réthimnon.

Things are pretty much burnt out over all the lowlands from July through to the end of September, though there are still some flowers in the mountains. Once the hot summer is over, blooming starts all over again. Some of the **autumn-flowering** species, such as cyclamens and autumn crocus, flower from October in the mountains into December in the south. And by then you might as well stay on for the first of the spring bulbs in January.

Year-round, the best insurance policy is to be prepared to move up and down the hills until you find flowers – from the beginning of March to the end of June you are almost guaranteed to find classic displays of flowers somewhere on the island, and you'll see the less spectacular but still worthwhile displays of autumn-flowering species from October to early December. If you have to go in July, August or September, then be prepared to see a restricted range, and also to go high up the mountains. The four habitats all have their own flowers, though some, of course, overlap.

On the **coast** you might find the spectacular **yellow horned poppy** growing on shingled banks, and **sea stocks** and **Virginia stocks** growing amongst the rocks behind the beach. A small pink **campion**, *Silene colorata*, is often colourfully present. Sand dunes are rare but sometimes there is a flat grazed area behind the beach; these are often good for **orchids**. **Tamarisk trees** often grow down to the shore, and there are frequent groves of Europe's largest grass, the **giant reed**, which can reach 4m high. In the autumn, look for the very large white flowers of the **sea daffodil**, as well as **autumn crocuses** on the banks behind the shore. The **sea squill** also blooms in autumn, with very tall spikes of white flowers rising from huge bulbs.

On **cultivated land** avoid large fields and plantations, but look for small hay meadows. These are often brilliant with annual "weeds" in late spring – various **chrysanthemum** species, **wild gladiolus**, **blue** and **purple vetches**, and in general a mass of colour such as you rarely see in northern Europe. This is partly because herbicides are used less, but mostly because the hot summers force plants into flowering at the same time.

The trees and shrubs on **low hillsides** are varied and beautiful, with colourful brooms flowering in early summer, preceded by bushy **rockroses** – *Cistaceae* – which are a mass of pink or white flowers in spring. Dotted amongst the shrubs is the occasional tree; the **non-deciduous plane tree** is an endemic variety, and the **Judas tree** flowers on bare wood in spring, making a blaze of pink against green hillsides which stands out for miles. Lower than the shrubs are the **aromatic herbs** – sage, rosemary, thyme and lavender – with perhaps some spiny species of **Euphorbia**. Particularly attractive is *Euphorbia acanthothamnos*, a rock-hugging species which forms low humps with small green leaves and delicate golden flowers. Because Crete is dry and hot for much of the year, you also get a high proportion of **xerophytes** – plants that are adapted to drought by having fleshy leaves and thick skins.

Below the herbs is the ground layer; peer around the edges and between the shrubs and you'll find a wealth of **orchids**, **anemones**, **grape hyacinths**, **irises**, and perhaps **fritillaries** if you're lucky. The orchids are extraordinary; some kinds – the Ophrys species – have especially fascinating and unusual flowers. Each Ophrys species is pollinated by a particular insect, which they attract by sight and smell: sight by having a flower which imitates the female insect and so deludes the male into "mating" with it; smell by imitating the particular sex pheromone which the insect uses. They're much smaller and altogether more dignified than the big blowsy tropical orchids you see in florists' stores.

The **irises** are appealing, too; one of them, a small blue species called *Iris sisyrinchium*, only flowers in the afternoon, and you can actually sit and watch them open at around midday. Once spring is over, these plants give way to the early summer flowering of the brooms and aromatic herbs, as well as a final fling from the annuals which sense the coming of the heat and their own death. When the heat of the summer is over, the autumn bulbs appear, with species of **crocus** and their relatives, the **colchicums** and the **sternbergias**, and finally the **autumn cyclamens** through into early December.

Mountains are good to visit later in the year. The rocky mountain **gorges** are considered to be the elite environments for plants, and house the greatest biodiversity; this is because most gorges are generally left ungrazed and undisturbed and it's often easy to find at least ten Cretan endemics without too much difficulty. The gorges are the home of many familiar garden rock plants, such as the **aubretias**, **saxifrages** and **alyssums**, as well as **dwarf bellflowers** and **anemones**. Look for dwarf **tulips** in fields on the upland plateaux in spring. The mountains are also the place to see the remaining Greek native pine **forests**, and in the woodland glades you will find **gentians**, **cyclamens** and **violets**. Above 1500m or so the forests begin to thin out, and in these upland meadows glorious **crocuses** flower almost before the snow has melted in spring – a very fine form of *Crocus seiberi* is a particularly early one. Autumn-flowering species of crocus and cyclamen should reward a visit later in the year.

Birds

More than 330 species of **birds** have been reported in Crete to date. There are a few endemic subspecies as well as some Mediterranean endemics that breed on the island. Greece has a good range of Mediterranean species plus a few very rare ones such as the **Eleanora's falcon** and the **Ruppell's warbler**, which have their European breeding strongholds in Greece, particularly on Crete. The great thing about bird-watching in Crete is that, if you pick your time right, you can see both resident and migratory species. Crete is on one of the main fly-past routes for species that have wintered in East Africa, but breed in eastern and northern Europe. They migrate every spring up the Nile valley, and then move across the eastern Mediterranean, often in huge numbers. This happens from mid-March to mid-May, depending on the species, the weather, and where you are. The return migration in autumn is less spectacular because it is less concentrated in time, but still worth watching out for.

One drawback is that until recently the "sport" of **shooting** songbirds was common, and although things have improved, the birds remain understandably cautious. Some are still caught for the cagebird trade, as you will realize from looking at the goldfinches and others hung in cages from the front of houses and apartments. Birds of prey get a rough deal, too, as witness the dusty cases of badly stuffed eagles in many tavernas and *kafenía*.

A general point about watching birds is that they're active at a pretty anti-social time – just after dawn is the peak activity time for most small birds. On a walk before breakfast you can see heaps of birds, yet you can walk the same area a few hours later and see almost nothing. Exceptions to this are water birds and wading birds, which are often visible all day, and big birds of prey, which frequently use the rising thermals of early evening to soar and gain height.

On the outskirts of towns and in the fields there are some colourful residents. Small predatory birds such as **woodchat shrikes**, **blackeared wheatears**, **kestrels** and migrating **red-footed falcons** can be seen perched on telegraph wires. The dramatic pink, black and white **hoopoe** and the striking yellow and black **golden oriole** are sometimes to be found in woodland and olive groves, and **Scops owls** (Europe's smallest owl) can often be heard calling around towns at night. They monotonously repeat a single "poo", sometimes in mournful vocal duets.

Look closely at the **swifts** and **swallows**, and you will find a few species not found in northern Europe: **crag martins** replace house martins in the **mountain gorges**, for example, and you may see the large **alpine swift**, which has a white belly. The **Sardinian warbler** dominates the rough scrubby **hillsides** – the male with a glossy black cap and an obvious red eye. These hillsides are also the home of the **chukar**, a species of partridge similar to the red-legged partridge found in Britain.

Wetlands and **coastal lagoons** are excellent for bird-spotting, especially at spring and autumn migration, although this habitat is hard to find. There's a wide variety of **herons** and **egrets**, as well as smaller waders such as the rare **avocet** and **marsh sandpiper** and **black-winged stilt**, which has ridiculously long pink legs. **Marsh harriers** are common too, drifting over the reedbeds on characteristic raised wings. Scrubby woodland around coastal wetlands is a good place to see migrating smaller birds such as **warblers**, **wagtails** and the like. They usually migrate up the coast, navigating by the stars; a thick mist or heavy cloud will force them to land, and you can sometimes see spectacular "falls" of migrants.

The mountains hold some of the most exciting birds in Crete. Smaller birds like the **blue rock thrush**, **cirl bunting** and **alpine chough** are common, and there is a good chance of seeing large and dramatic birds of prey. The **buzzards** and smaller eagles are confusingly similar, but there are also **golden eagles**, **Bonelli's eagles** and **vultures**. One very rare species of vulture, the **lammergeier** (or bearded vulture), is currently on the dramatically endangered list although it used to be more common in Crete than anywhere else in Europe; you may be lucky enough to spot one of the island's 25 remaining birds (only four breeding pairs) soaring above the Lasíthi or Omalós plateaux. It's a huge bird, with a wingspan of nearly three metres, and with narrower wings and a longer wedge-shaped tail than the other vulture you are likely to see, the **griffon vulture**.

Mammals

Cretan **mammals** are elusive, generally nocturnal, and very hard to see. Islands tend to have fewer species than the mainland, because mammals can't swim or fly to get there, and in this Crete is no exception, with about half the species that you could expect to see on mainland Greece. Even such common animals as the red squirrel and fox have never made it across the water, nor will you find large exciting mammals like wolves or lynxes in the mountains, as you might (although very rarely) on the mainland.

However, there are some compensations. Islands often have their own endemic species, and one in Crete is the **Cretan spiny mouse**, which is found nowhere else; if you happen to be on a rocky hillside at dusk you may see this largish mouse with very big ears and a spiny back fossicking around. The other compensation in Crete is the ancestral **wild goat** or *kri-kri*; a small population still exists in the White Mountains around the Samariá Gorge, and also on some offshore islands – but you'll be lucky if you see one outside the zoos. Apart from those, Crete has fourteen bat species, as well as **weasels**, **badgers**, **hares**, **hedgehogs**, **field mice**, **shrews** and **beech martens**.

One recent addition to the zoological record was the remarkable rediscovery in 1996 of the **Cretan wildcat** (see p.268), long thought to be either extinct or a folktale. Only a single specimen has ever been captured alive and the population status of the animal is still unknown.

There are several marine mammals that can occasionally be seen in offshore waters. The critically endangered and extremely rare **Mediterranean monk seal** breeds in a few sea caves around the island. The deep waters off the south coast of Haniá have recently become well known for a resident population of **sperm whales**. Up to two hundred individuals may feed here and some have even been spotted from the high cliffs of the coastal path. **Dolphins** – which so delighted the Minoans – can be seen all round the island but you'll be most likely to see them while on a boat or ferry.

Reptiles and amphibians

The hot, rocky terrain of Crete suits **reptiles** well, with plenty of sun to bask in and plenty of rocks to hide under, but the island's isolation has severely restricted the number of species occurring: fewer than a third of those that are found on the mainland. Identification is therefore rather easy. If you sit and watch a dry stone wall almost anywhere in the western half of the island you're bound to see the small local wall lizard, **Erhard's wall lizard**. A rustle in the rocks by the side of the road might be an **ocellated skink** – a bit like a lizard, but with a thicker body and a stubbier neck. In the bushes of the *maquis* and *phrígana* you may see the **Balkan green lizard**, a truly splendid bright green animal up to 50cm long, most of which is tail – usually seen as it runs frantically on its hind legs from one bush to another.

At night, **geckoes** replace the lizards. Geckoes are small (less than 10cm), have big eyes and round adhesive pads on their toes which enable them to walk upside down on the ceiling. Sometimes they come into houses – in which case welcome them, for they will keep down the mosquitoes and other biting insects. Crete has three out of four European species. The island is also one of only a handful of places where the **chameleon** occurs in Europe, although it is extremely rare, and there are only a couple of known specimens; this may (or may not) be attributed to its camouflage skills. It lives in bushes and low trees, and hunts by day; its colour is greenish but obviously variable.

Tortoises, sadly, don't occur in Crete, but the stripe-necked **terrapin** does. Look out for these in any freshwater habitat – Lake Kournás and the Ayía bird sanctuary, for example, or even in the cistern at the Zákros palace. There are also **sea turtles**

△ Leopard snake

in the Mediterranean: you might be lucky and see one while you're swimming or on a boat, since they sometimes bask on the surface of the water. The one you're most likely to see is the **loggerhead turtle**, which can grow up to 1m long. Crete has important breeding populations on beaches to the west of Haniá, around Mátala, and the largest (over 350 nests) at Réthimnon, but tourism and the development associated with it are threatening their future. Each year, many turtles are injured by motorboats, their nests are destroyed by bikes and jeeps ridden on the beaches, and the newly hatched young die entangled in deckchairs and umbrellas left out at night on the sand. The turtles are easily frightened by noise and lights too, which makes them uneasy cohabitants with freelance campers and discos.

The Greek government has passed **laws** designed to protect the loggerheads, and the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece now operates an ambitious conservation programme but, in addition to the thoughtlessness of visitors, local economic interests tend to prefer a beach full of bodies to a sea full of turtles.

The final group of reptiles are the **snakes**, represented by four species, only one of which is poisonous – the **cat snake**. Even this is back-fanged and therefore extremely unlikely to be able to bite anything as big as a human, so you can relax a bit when strolling round the hillsides; most snakes are very timid and easily frightened anyway. One species worth looking out for is the beautiful **leopard snake**, which is grey with red blotches edged in black. It's fond of basking on the sides of roads and paths.

Only three species of **amphibian** occur in Crete. The **green toad** is smaller than the common toad, with an obvious marbled green and grey back. The **marsh frog** is a large frog, greenish but variable in colour, and very noisy in spring. And **tree frogs** are small, live in trees, and call very loudly at night. They have a stripe down the flank, and vary in colour from bright green to golden brown, depending on where they are sitting – they can change colour like chameleons.

Insects

Insects are much neglected – which is a shame because many of them are beautiful, most lead fascinating lives, and they are numerous and easy to observe. You need to adjust your eyes to their scale to see them best: sit down for half an hour in the countryside by a bit of grazed turf, a patch of long grass or a shrubby bush, and think small. You'll be surprised at the variety of shapes and colours of insects that will slowly come into focus.

There are around a million different species of insects in the world, and even in Crete there are probably a few hundred that have yet to be scientifically described or labelled. About a third of all insect species are beetles, and these are very obvious wherever you go. You might see one of the dung beetles rolling a ball of dung along a path like the mythological Sisyphus. If you have time to look closely at bushes and small trees, you might be rewarded with a stick insect or a **praying mantis**, creatures that are rarely seen because of their excellent camouflage.

The **grasshopper** and **cricket** family are well represented, and most patches of grass will hold a few. Grasshoppers produce their chirping noise by rubbing a wing against a leg, but crickets do it by rubbing both wings together. **Cicadas**, which most people think of as a night-calling grasshopper, aren't actually related at all – they're more of a large leaf-hopper. Their continuous whirring call is one of the characteristic sounds of the Mediterranean night, and is produced by the rapid vibration of two membranes, called tymbals, on either side of their body.

Perhaps the most obvious insects are the **butterflies**, because they're large, brightly coloured and fly by day. Any time from spring through most of summer is good for butterflies, and there's a second flight of adults of many species in the autumn. Dramatic varieties in Crete include two species of **swallowtail**, easily identified by their large size, yellow and black colouring, and long spurs at the back of the hind wings. **Cleopatras** are large, brilliant yellow butterflies, related to the brimstone of northern Europe, but bigger and more colourful. Look out also for **Cretan Argus** – chocolate brown in colour and only found in the Psilorítis and Dhíkti mountain ranges, it is now thought to be increasingly threatened by human activity. One final species typical of Crete is the **eastern festoon**, an unusual butterfly with tropical colours, covered in yellow, red and black zig-zags. It flies in the spring, its caterpillars feeding on *Aristolochia* (birthwort) plants.

Sites

You don't need to go that far to see Cretan wildlife – even in Iráklion, patches of **wasteland** hold interesting and colourful flowers, and nearby Knossós is good for flowers, insects and reptiles. In general, though, people and wildlife don't go together too well, so it's best to get away from the towns and into the villages.

A good site is worth visiting at any time of the year, except in high summer when everything is burnt out anyway. It's also usually true that a good flower site will yield plenty of other wildlife, and vice versa: a wide variety of plants leads to a wide variety of insects, which in turn implies that birds and reptiles will be numerous. So you can often use a blaze of plants as an indicator for a spot that would be worth exploring.

A possible exception to this is birds. Birds are mobile and fickle, often choosing to congregate in unprepossessing places such as windswept estuaries or smelly sewage farms. Birds adapt well to small-scale agriculture, too, even though the native plants may have been out-competed by olives, artichokes or melons.

Lasíthi

The **eastern end** of Crete is the driest part, and also the part where **spring** comes first. So it would be good to base yourself here if you were planning a trip early in the year, say February. The extreme eastern coast is dry and rocky, although Vái boasts a much-photographed grove of the Cretan **date palm**, one of only two native European palm species. Further west, the scenery is dominated by the Dhíkti mountains and the big bay of Áyios Nikólaos: even close by the development here, some good sites for flowers and birds survive.

The nearest of these is **Lató**, overlooking plains of olives and fruit trees that run down to the sea. It's a mass of colour with flowers in the spring, and, in common with other ancient sites, its old walls and ruins are a perfect habitat for lizards. **Mália**, similarly, has good flowers in spring and early summer, and the added advantage of being close to seacliffs where you can find many of the typical Mediterranean seashore flowers. Between the ancient site and the shore are the remains of a marsh, which is likely to hold interesting birds, including herons, harriers and migrating small warblers. **Gourniá** is also worth a trip for its flowers: they're particularly good at all of these sites because goats are excluded. Look for anemones in the spring; although there's only one spring species, *Anemone coronaria*, it comes in a bewildering range of colours from white to purple and scarlet. An Asiatic buttercup species which grows round here (*Ranunculus asiaticus*, a common plant over much of Crete) is quite unlike the buttercups of northern Europe, being much larger and with colours including white, pink and yellow. Around the walls of Gourniá you'll also find a large yellow and white daisy, *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, a species which is attractive to butterflies.

Just north of Áyios Nikólaos is the island of **Spinalónga**, and nearby, the disused saltpans at **Eloúnda**. The island is good for flowers, and the saltpans are always worth checking out for birds, especially during spring and autumn migration time. Another good place for bird-spotting is **Bramiana reservoir** just a few kilometres to the northwest of Ierápetra. Created in 1986, over 150 bird species have now been seen there and the site is being developed, albeit slowly, with EU funding. A permanent hide along with nature trails are planned and even as it stands it is worth the detour if you are in the area.

Later in the year, the uplands of **Mount Dhíkti** and the **Lasíthi plateau** come into their own. The plateau is at 850m, so its spring flowers come later than those in the lowlands – April or early May would be a good time, with the summer flowers going on into June. The plateau itself is well cultivated, but the areas round the edge are rich in flowers, including many orchids. Try exploring a bit off the well-worn track from Psihró to the Dhiktean Cave. Here you may find two varieties in particular: *Ophrys tenthredenifera*, one of the largest and most dramatic of the insect-imitating orchids, with beautiful pink sepals and a brown lower lip fringed with pale yellow; and the butterfly orchid *Orchis papilionacea*, which has a compact spike of pink florets, each with a large lip spotted and streaked with darker pink. Keep your eyes on the skies, too, since you are close to the mountains: sightings of eagles and vultures, including lammergeiers, are always possible.

Mount Dhíkti goes up to over 2000m, and boasts most of the dramatic flowers of the Cretan mountains. Look for early-flowering crocus species on the edge of the melting snowfields in April and May, and maybe you'll find cyclamens and peonies under the mountain woodland as well. Rocky gullies amongst the mountains are rich in specially adapted plants called chasmophytes, including endemic Cretan species.

Iráklion

Although **Iráklion** is the only one of the four Cretan provinces that doesn't have a major mountain range, it includes the foothills of both the Dhíkti range to the east and the Psiloritis massif in the west.

The ancient Minoan site of **Festós** is an excellent start. The ruins are only average for wildlife, but the hills around are excellent for flowers, insects and reptiles, and the river running through Ayía Triádha is always worth checking out for birds. The site of Festós itself is also a good place to look for bird migration; since it's high up, you stand a good chance of seeing migrating birds of prey coming over the plain and up into the hills.

If you walk from the car park heading north, you find yourself on a lovely hillside. There are scrubby bushes of rockroses – *Cistus* species – and round these a wonderful display of anemones, irises, orchids and the whole panoply of Cretan spring flowers. *Anemone heldreichii*, a delicate blue and white variety, is one of Crete's 180 or so endemic species. Another plant with a very restricted distribution is *Ophrys cretica*, one of the insect-imitating orchids with distinctive white markings on its maroon lip. In spring, *Orchis italica* is the most obvious **orchid** – tall shaggy spikes of smallpink florets, each looking like a small man with a cap ("man" is used advisedly here, as you will realize if you look closely at the plant). One final flower to look out for is familiar as an annual garden flower, love-in-a-mist *Nigella arvensis*. With blooms varying from deep blue to pale pink, it's best known for its extraordinary inflated fruit, surrounded by a crown of deeply dissected bracts.

There are **butterflies** here too, including the scarce swallowtail, attracted by the nectar. Keep your eyes open, too, for Balkan green lizards in the bushes. Further on towards Ayía Triádha the river holds passage migrants including herons, terns and sandpipers – and the bushes are often full of migrating passerines, hotfoot from Africa. As always, a careful scrutiny of bushes and grasses will produce a horde of beetles, spiders and other invertebrates – with a chance of a praying mantis to brighten things up.

Réthimnon

The two areas selected in Réthimnon are both on the south coast. That doesn't mean that you should ignore the rest: three other extremely promising sites are the Nídha plateau above Anóyia, the foothills of Mount Kédhros above Spíli, and the Amári valley.

Ayía Galíni, for all its summer crowds, is a great spot in spring, with some excellent walks on the headlands and hills roundabout, small-scale hayfields and olive groves, and a riverbed with some marshy areas. In other words, a really good range of the typical Cretan lowland habitats, and all within easy walking distance.

The river flows into the east of the village. On the far side is a range of hills, worth exploring for spring flowers, and the caves and cliffs overlooking the river have breeding colonies of lesser kestrels and Alpine swifts. The small reedbeds and marshy areas around the river have warblers and nightingales, too, and there are hoopoes in the olive groves.

A series of tracks leads away to the north and along the cliffs to the west. Any of these go through typical *phrígana* habitat, in which are scattered small meadows with wild gladioli and tassel hyacinths. The latter species is related to the grape hyacinth which is often used in boring clumps by British gardeners, but is far more attractive growing wild. Look for Jerusalem sage *Phlomis fruticosa*, a downy shrub whose golden flowers are attractive to bees. Another plant that grows around here (and many other places in Crete) is the unmistakeable giant fennel, a huge plant over two metres tall. Its scientific name is *Ferula communis*, which implies that it was once used as a walking stick, and, seeing the size of the stems, you can see why. There are orchids growing on the hillsides, including a Cretan speciality that rejoices in the name of *Ophrys fuciflora maxima*; a large orchid, it has a "face" on its lower lip that looks rather like a Minoan bull.

Further along the coast to the west, **Moní Préveli** has a similar range of habitats and fewer people. Again, there is a river valley that repays exploration for migratory birds, open hillsides with flowers and aromatic herbs, and some rugged coastal scenery. If you see a small scrub warbler around here with a black cap and throat, a red eye and a white "moustache", then you may have seen Ruppell's warbler, probably the rarest warbler in Europe. The whole coastline from Préveli to Ayía Rouméli, some 75km to the west, is wild and rugged, punctuated by gorges, and a good place to look for large eagles and vultures.

Haniá

Haniá, at the western end of Crete, contains some of the wildest and least developed scenery in the whole of the Mediterranean. Yeoryioúpolis on the north coast and the famous Samariá Gorge are described in detail here – but there are lots of other opportunities.

Yeoryioúpolis has a wide range of habitats within easy reach – a marsh, a river with reedbeds, dry hillsides along the coast to the north, Crete's only freshwater lake – and an excellent beach as well. Between the main road and the sea are low sand dunes, often a good place for colourful flowers like Virginia stocks, sea stocks and the yellow horned poppy. Close to the east of the village is a marshy area, with birds like reed (and other) warblers, and marsh harriers floating overhead. There's a very pleasant walk along the River Almirós, branching up through olive groves and scrubby slopes to the hilltop village above. Here you'll find numerous small birds, attracted by unusually dense and lush woodland. Inland a bit is the small lake at **Kournás**, where a paddle round the lake may reveal stripe-necked terrapins poking their heads out of the water.

The **Samariá Gorge** is rightly famous for wildlife as well as scenery, but remember that you'll find very similar flora and fauna at Ímbros and the other less-known ravines. The best flowers and other wildlife all come in the higher reaches, where you have the marvellous combination of rocky cliffs coming down into upland woods.

Still better, if you have time, is to take more than a day over this trip and spend some time on the **Omalós plateau** before heading down. This is especially rewarding later in the year, when the plateau and the slopes around it will have spring and summer flowers long after everything is burnt out on the coast. The plateau is renowned for its mountain flowers, including the very variable *Tulipa saxatilis*, a small pink or purple tulip endemic to Crete. Other endemic species found here include Cretan dittany *Origanum dictamnus*, a lowshrub with furry rounded leaves and pink flowers, regarded by locals as a medical panacea (you may be offered it as a tea) and *Daphne sericea*, an evergreen shrub, with very unusual two-tone flowers of pink and yellow. There are also rare birds and mammals – watch the sky for golden eagles, griffon vultures, lammergeiers and falcons, and the distant cliffs and surrounding mountains for wild goats.

The start of the gorge takes you down the wooden staircase through light woodland. There are rock thrushes on the cliffs – the male has a striking orange breast, blue head and white rump. Rock plants like *Aubretia* grow on the cliffs, along with *Linum arboreum*, a low perennial flax with brilliant yellow flowers. Two endemic cliff plants to watch for are the Cretan rock lettuce *Petromarula pinnata*, which looks nothing like a lettuce and isn't even related, with long spikes of deep blue flowers, and *Ebenus cretica*, a bushy pea with grey foliage and pink flowers.

Under the trees at the sides of the paths are orchids, including the handsome yellow *Orchis provincialis*, with a tight flowerhead of spiked yellow florets. Cyclamens and anemones grow here, and you may find a fritillary *Fritillaria messanensis*, with a drooping purple and green bell-shaped flower. Perhaps the most stunning flower is a white peony with huge, yellow-centred flowers: called *Paeoni clusii*, it grows in profusion around the ruined chapel about 3km down the gorge. There are more lovely flower meadows round the village of Samariá, about halfway down, but as you drop lower the cliffs tower above you until it is hard to see anything else, and once you are through the famous gates at the end, the walk is less interesting in every sense. Around the base of the cliffs at the bottom of the gorge are colonies of crag martins – a drab-looking bird, but a dramatic flier.

by Pete Raine and Stephen Roberts

Books

From Homer on, Crete has inspired an exceptionally wide range of literature, and in Níkos Kazantzákis the island has also produced one truly world-class author. Sadly, some of it is out of print, but many of the more popular titles below are widely available in Crete – although local editions tend to be shabby, and imported ones expensive.

The more specialist titles might be more easily found at a dedicated travel bookstore or a Greek-interest bookshop: in the UK, try the Hellenic Book Service, 91 Fortess Rd, London NW5 1AG (ⓣ020/7267 9499, ⓦwww.hellenicbookservice.com) or Zeno's Greek Bookshop, 57a Nether St, North Finchley, London N12 7NP (ⓣ020/8446 1985, ⓦwww.thegreekbookshop.com). On Crete, Planet International Bookstore, Hándhakos 73, Iráklion (ⓣ2810 289605, ⓔritio@otenet.gr), is an excellent source which should stock any of those books below that are mainly sold on the island. If you phone or email them, they will post books out to you immediately, trusting you to pay later.

Where separate editions exist in the UK and USA, publishers are detailed below in the form "UK publisher; US publisher". Where books are published in one country only, this follows the publisher's name. "UP" stands for University Press; "o/p" signifies an out-of-print – but still highly recommended – book. Titles marked 🏃 are particularly recommended.

Archeology and ancient history

There is a vast body of literature on ancient Crete, especially on the Minoans, but a lot of it is very heavy going. Below are some of the more widely available, accessible and useful books. Other names to look out for include **Nikólaos Pláton** and **Stylianós Aléxiou**, whose books you may find available in local translations. There are also local guide booklets on all the major museums and sites, often with nice pictures, but usually very poor text.

Gerald Cadogan *Palaces of Minoan Crete* (Routledge). Complete guide to all the major sites, with much more history and general information than the name implies.

Pat Cameron *The Blue Guide* (A&C Black; WW Norton). Recently updated, this is an excellent detailed guide to the churches, archeological sites and museums across the island. However, some directions to remote sights often lack clarity and the accommodation and eating recommendations are not always reliable.

John Chadwick *Linear B and related scripts* (British Museum Publications; University of California Press). A short version of *The Decipherment of Linear B* (Cambridge UP), in which the whole fascinating story is graphically told by Chadwick, who collaborated with Ventris, the English architect who made the crucial breakthrough. The same author's *Mycenaean World* (Cambridge UP) vividly describes the society revealed by the tablets.

Leonard Cottrell *The Bull of Minos* (Bell & Hyman o/p; Amereon Aeonian Press; Efstathiadis, Athens). Breathless and somewhat dated account of the discoveries of Schliemann and Evans; easy reading.

Costis Davaras *Guide to Cretan Antiquities* (Noyes Press, US; Eptalofolos, Athens). A fascinating guide by the distinguished archeologist and former director of the Áyios Nikólaos museum to the antiquities of Crete (from the ancient through to the Turkish eras). Cross-referenced in dictionary form, it has authoritative articles on all the major sites as well as subjects as diverse as Minoan razors and toilet articles, the disappearance of Cretan forests and the career of Venizélos. Widely available at museums on the island.

Arthur Evans *The Palace of Minos* (o/p). The seminal work, still worth a look if you can find it in a library.

J. Lesley Fitton *Minoans* (British Museum Publications, UK). Although part of a series aimed at general readers, this can become relentlessly academic. However, it brings together many of the more recent theories about the Minoans, debunking some familiar myths and setting their society into a wider context.

Reynold Higgins *Minoan and Mycenaean Art* (Thames & Hudson; Oxford UP o/p). Solid introduction to the subject with plenty of illustrations.

J. Alexander Macgillivray *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth* (Jonathan Cape; Hill & Wang). Excellent and long-overdue book by a Crete-based archeologist which shows how Evans fitted the evidence found at Knossós to his own pre-conception of the Minoans as peaceful, literate and aesthetic second-millennium BC Victorians. A superb read.

J.D.S. Pendlebury *The Archaeology of Crete* (Methuen o/p; Norton o/p). Still the most comprehensive handbook, detailing virtually every archeological site on the island. Pendlebury's *Handbook to the Palace of Minos* is still an excellent guide to the Knossós site by someone who – as curator after Evans's retirement – knew it inside out. A local edition has been reprinted in Crete.

Nikos Psilakis *Monasteries and Byzantine Memories of Crete* (locally published). Self-explanatory title: readable and well-illustrated.

Ian F. Sanders *Roman Crete* (Aris & Phillips; Humanities Press). Very dry, and hard to come by, but a total record of all Roman remains on Crete.

Peter Warren *The Aegean Civilizations* (Phaidon o/p; Peter Bedrick o/p). Illustrated introduction by one of the leading modern experts; it's essentially a coffee-table book, but informative and easy on the eye. Warren's other publications tend to the technical.

R.F. Willetts *Everyday Life in Ancient Crete* (Batsford o/p; John Benjamins). A more accessible read for the layperson than his other scholarly accounts including *The Civilization of Ancient Crete* (Barnes & Noble, US) and *Cretan Cults and Festivals* (Greenwood Press).

H.G. Wunderlich *The Secret of Crete* (Efstadhiadis, Athens). The secret is that the palaces were really elaborate tombs or necropoli. Sensationalist nonsense widely sold on Crete.

History and architecture

In contrast with the proliferation of ancient history, there is no book in English devoted to modern Cretan history. Good general accounts are included in Hopkins's and Smith's books on the island, but otherwise you're forced to wade through Greek or Ottoman history, selecting the relevant portions.

Michele Buonsanti & Alberta Galla *Candia Veneziana – Venetian Itineraries Through Crete* (Mystis Editions, Crete). Useful guide to the under-documented wealth of monuments surviving from La Serenissima's four and a half centuries of hegemony over the island. Widely available from bookshops on Crete.

Richard Clogg *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge UP). A rigorously historical account of Greek history from its emergence from Ottoman rule to the present day, covering the wider aspects of Crete's struggle for independence and union with Greece.

Greek Traditional Architecture – Crete (Melissa Publishing, Athens). Comprehensive overview of Cretan domestic architecture focussing on Byzantine, Venetian and Turkish influences as well as the evolution of traditional village dwellings.

Adam Hopkins *Crete, Its Past, Present and People* (Faber & Faber, o/p). Excellent general introduction to Cretan history and society with lots of interesting detail on topics as diverse as the Battle of Crete, daily life and diet, the arrival of mass tourism and medicinal wild herbs.

John Julius Norwich *Byzantium: the Early Centuries*, *Byzantium: the Apogee* and *Byzantium: Decline and Fall* (all Penguin; Knopf). The three volumes of Norwich's history of the Byzantine Empire are terrific narrative accounts, and much can be gleaned from them about Crete in this period.

James Pettifer *The Greeks: the Land and People since the War* (Penguin, UK). Excellent introduction to contemporary Greece and its recent past. Pettifer roams the country and charts the state of the nation's politics, food, family life, religion, tourism and all points in between. Only passing references to Crete, however.

Oliver Rackham and Jennifer Moody *The Making of the Cretan Landscape* (Manchester UP). An enthralling botanical and anthropological study of the Cretans in their environment, from antiquity to the present day with sections devoted to the island's geological formation, vegetation, people and settlements.

Michael Llewellyn Smith *The Great Island* (Allen Lane, UK, o/p). Covers much of the same ground as Hopkins's book (above), but with more emphasis on folk traditions, and a lengthy analysis of Cretan song.

World War II

Antony Beevor *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* (Penguin; Westview Press o/p). Relatively short study of the Battle of Crete, with insights into the characters involved. Beevor looks at recent evidence to conclude that defeat was at least in part due to the need to conceal Allied intelligence successes.

Alan Clark *The Fall of Crete* (NEL, UK, o/p; terrible Efstadhiadis edition widely sold on Crete). Racy and sensational – but very readable – military history by the late maverick English politician. Detailed on the battles, and more critical of the command than you might expect from a former cabinet minister.

Lew Lind *Flowers of Rethymnon* (Efstadhiadis, widely available on the island). A gripping personal account of his part in the Battle of Crete and subsequent escape by a (then) 19-year-old Australian soldier. The carnage of the battle is rivetingly described and shining through the grim horror of it all comes the unflinching bravery of the Cretan villagers who repeatedly and selflessly put themselves in mortal danger of German reprisals by helping servicemen trapped on Crete – such as Lind – escape to Egypt.

W. Stanley Moss *Ill Met by Moonlight* (Buchan & Enright; Lyons). An account of the capture of General Kreipe by one of the participants, largely taken from his diaries of the time. Good *Boys' Own*-style adventure stuff. Moss also translated Baron von der Heydte's *Daedalus Returned* (o/p), which gives something of the other side of the story.

George Panayiotakis *The Battle of Crete* (local edition). Pictorial history of the battle and its aftermath using contemporary photos. Available from major bookshops on the island.

George Psychoundákis *The Cretan Runner* (Penguin; Transatlantic Arts, US; Efstadhiadis, Athens). Account of the invasion and resistance by a Cretan participant; Psychoundákis (who died in 2006) was a guide and message-runner for all the leading English-speaking protagonists. Great, although not much appreciated by many of his compatriots who tend to dismiss him as an English lackey.

Tony Simpson *The Battle for Crete, 1941* (o/p). A very different way of looking at the subject, putting the campaign into an international context and relying heavily on oral history for details of the combat. Uncompromisingly critical of the command, and far more interesting than straight military history.

Evelyn Waugh *Officers and Gentlemen* (Penguin; Little, Brown), *Diaries* (Phoenix; Little, Brown). Both include accounts of the Battle of Crete, and particularly of the horrors of the flight and evacuation.

Travel writing

Anonymous *Greek Men Made Simple* (MUC, Athens). "Everything you ever wanted to know plus everything you never thought to ask" is the subtitle of this hilarious dissection of the Greek male and his sexual ego by a Greek-resident English woman (hence the anonymity) with plenty of experience of both. Despite clumsy editing, it's an invaluable *vade mecum* for would-be Shirley Valentines and is available at bookshops on the island.

Robin Bryant *Crete* (o/p). Thematic interweaving of the author's observations during his stay on Crete with aspects of the island's history, folklore and festivals, immediately prior to the arrival of package tourism.

Johan de Bakker (ed) *Across Crete – From Khaniá to Heráklion* (I.B. Tauris). Fascinating anthology depicting Crete as seen through the eyes of nineteenth-century travellers including Pashley, Pockocke, Spratt and Lear. This is the first of a planned three-volume set; the later volumes are to cover travellers in eastern and western Crete.

David MacNeill Doren *Winds of Crete* (John Murray, UK, o/p; Efstathiadis, Athens). An American and his Swedish wife find enlightenment on Crete in the early 1970s and before the arrival of mass tourism. Between times, quite an amusing and well-observed travelogue documenting many of the island's customs and curiosities in addition to some hair-raising brushes with Cretan physicians. Widely available at bookshops on the island.

Edward Lear *The Cretan Journal* (Denise Harvey, Athens). Diary of Lear's trip to Crete in 1864, illustrated with his sketches and watercolours. He didn't enjoy himself much.

Henry Miller *The Colossus of Maroussi* (Minerva o/p; New Directions). Miller's idiosyncratic account of his travels in Greece on the eve of World War II includes a trip to Crete where diarrhoea, biting flies and Festós palace all get bit-parts in the epic.

Robert Pashley *Travels in Crete* (John Murray o/p). The original nineteenth-century British traveller, full of erudite observations, interesting anecdotes and outrageous attitudes. Try finding it at a library.

Dilys Powell *The Villa Ariadne* (Hodder & Stoughton, UK; Efstadhiadis, Athens). The story of the British in Crete, from Arthur Evans to Paddy Leigh Fermor, through the villa at Knossós which saw all of them. Good at bringing the excitement of the early archeological work to life, but rather syrupy in style.

Pandelis Prevelakis *Tale of a Town* (Doric Publications, Athens). English translation of a native's description of life and times in Réthimnon during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

J.E. Hilary Skinner *Roughing It in Crete* (1868 o/p). Great title for this account of another Englishman's adventures, this time with a band of rebels. Interesting on the less glamorous side of the independence struggle, since he spent the whole time searching for food or dodging Turkish patrols.

Capt. T.A.B. Spratt *Travels and Researches in Crete* (Coronet Books, US). Another nineteenth-century Briton who caught the Cretan bug whilst surveying the island's coastline, and left behind this account of its natural history, geology and archeology.

Patricia Storace *Dinner with Persephone* (Granta Books; Pantheon). Although not specifically about Crete, this is one of the best books ever written on the Greeks by a foreign author. Storace, an American poet, learned the language and went to live with and travel among the Hellenes for a year, delving deep into the psyche of this superficially attractive, but fiendishly complex people. Ideal holiday reading – you'll never look at the Greeks in the same light again.

Christopher Thorne *Between the Seas* (Sinclair Stevenson o/p; Trafalgar Square, o/p). The account of a walk along the length of the island with observations on Cretan country life, past and present.

Jackson Webb *The Last Lemon Grove* (o/p). Published in 1977, an account of an American living in the then-remote village of Paleohóra. Wonderfully atmospheric.

Fiction

Victoria Hislop *The Island* (Review Headline, UK). The former leper colony of Spinalonga forms the backdrop to this novel about a young woman discovering her Cretan roots. A potentially good story is marred by the cloying and derivative manner of its telling.

Homer *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (Penguin Classics and many other editions). The first concerns itself, semi-factually, with the Trojan War; the second recounts the hero Odysseus's long journey home, via Crete and seemingly every other corner of the Mediterranean. Homer's accounts were in some ways responsible for the "rediscovery" of Minoan Crete in the nineteenth century, so it seems appropriate to read them here.

Níkos Kazantzákís *Zorba the Greek*; *Freedom and Death*; *Report to Greco* (all Faber & Faber; Simon & Schuster; local editions available in Crete). Something by the great Cretan novelist and man of letters is essential reading. Forget the film: *Zorba the Greek* is a wonderful read on Crete which provides the backdrop to the adventures of one of the most irresistible characters of modern fiction. *Freedom and Death* is, if anything, even better.

Ioannis Kondylakis *Patouchas* (Efstathiadis, Athens). The story of a Cretan shepherd on a journey of self-discovery is a wonderfully observed and humorous fictional sketch of Turkish Crete in the nineteenth century by a little-known Cretan author. Widely available on the island.

Vitzentzos Kornaros *Erotokritos* (tr. Theodore Stefanides, Merlin Press; Humanities). A beautifully produced English translation of the massive sixteenth-century Cretan epic poem.

Rory MacLean *Falling for Icarus* (Penguin Viking, UK/US). Idiosyncratic semi-fictional tale of building a flying machine in a west Cretan village. A parade of humorous characters gives the story wings in its early stages, but the convoluted account of frustrations and DIY engineering leading to the eventual flight and crash landing fails to maintain momentum.

F. Ragovin *Cretan Mantinades* (Cnossos Editions, Athens). Parallel translations of many of the best examples of the island's most popular form of vocal music dealing with subject matter as diverse as love and marriage, oaths and curses, and the war against Hitler.

Mary Renault *The King Must Die* (Sceptre o/p; Vintage); *The Bull from the Sea* (Penguin; Vintage). Stirring accounts of the Theseus legend and Minoan Crete for those who like their history in fictionalized form.

Wildlife and geology

Michael Chinerey *Collins Guide to the Insects of Britain and Western Europe* (Collins, UK). This doesn't specifically include Greece (there's no comprehensive guide to Greek insects) but it gives a good general background and identification to the main families of insects that you're likely to see.

Stephanie Coghlan *Birdwatching in Crete* (Snails Pace Publishing, UK; order direct by email: ⓔcoghlansm@aol.com). Slim book detailing the best bird-watching sites throughout the island and what you may see there, with checklists. No pictures for identification though, so you'll need a guide too.

Charalampos G. Fassoulas *Field Guide to the Geology of Crete* (Natural History Museum of Crete). Excellent introduction to Crete's fascinating geology, explaining the island's geological evolution, paleography and paleontology. Superb colour photos and details of where to find many of the most interesting sites. Widely available at bookshops on the island.

Bob Gibbons *Travellers' Nature Guides: Greece* (Oxford UP, UK/US). Good general guide to the ecology, flora and fauna of Greece with a section devoted to Crete.

Mullarney, Svensson, Zetterstrom and Grant *Bird*

Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe (HarperCollins). Outstanding guide to European birds covering most species you're likely to find in Crete. Superbly illustrated, it's a more recently published alternative to the Peterson et al volume (below).

Anthony Huxley and William Taylor *Flowers of Greece* (Hogarth Press o/p; Trafalgar Square o/p). The best book for identifying flowers in Crete.

Christopher Perrins *New Generations Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe* (HarperCollins; University of Texas Press). An alternative look at bird ecology as well as pure identification.

Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (HarperCollins; Houghton Mifflin). There's no complete guide to Cretan birds; this is one of the best general tomes – ageing but excellent.

George Sfikas *Wild Flowers of Crete* (Efstathiadis, Athens). Comprehensive illustrated guide to the island's flora. Widely available at bookshops on the island.

Paul Whalley *The Mitchell Beazley Pocket Guide to Butterflies* (Mitchell Beazley; published in the US as *Butterflies* by Transatlantic Arts). A useful identification guide.

Hiking and travel guides

Anavasi *Crete Hiking Maps* (Anavasi; ⓦwww.mountains.gr). Excellent new (and long overdue) 1:25,000 scale hikers' map series covering Greece with three maps dedicated to the Lefká Óri (White Mountains), Samariá and Sfakiá. Widely available at bookshops on Crete and – as more maps are planned – it's worth keeping an eye on their website.

Bruce and Naomi Caughey *Crete off the Beaten Track* (Cicerone Press, UK). Details a large number of walks throughout the island; available in many bookstores in major towns.

Lance Chilton *Ten Walks in the Plakiás Area* and *Six Walks in the Georgioupolis Area* (both Marengo, UK, 17 Bernard Crescent, Hunstanton, Norfolk PE36 6ER ⓣ & ⓕ01485/532710, ⓦwww.marengowalks.com). Well-described rambles and treks ranging from half an hour to half a day in these two scenic zones, by an experienced guide. *More Challenging Walks in the Plakiás Area* is a more recent addition. Free walk updates are available on the website. Available from bookshops in the UK or from the publisher.

Freytag & Berndt *Crete Hiking Map* (Freytag & Berndt). Booklet and map pack in German, Greek and English describing twenty walks all over the island ranging from a couple of hours to full-day treks; the accompanying large-scale 1:50,000 map is admirably clear. Widely available from bookshops on the island.

Jonnie Godfrey and Elizabeth Karslake *Landscapes of Eastern/Western Crete* (Sunflower, UK). Full of hiking and touring suggestions which make a useful adjunct to this guide.

Alan Hall *Western Crete – 45 Walks in Kissamos and Selinos* (Cicerone, UK, ⓦwww.cicerone.co.uk). A useful book of hikes – with plenty of background detail – covering the extreme west of Crete and detailing over forty walks of between 5km and 20km, with the majority under ten.

Stephanos Psimenos *Unexplored Crete* (Road Editions, Athens). Bible-sized (motor)biker's guide to the island packed with loads of biker information and bonding lingo, related in an often quirky translation from the original Greek. Still, if you want to bike around the island using routes known only to goats, this is the book for you. Widely available at bookshops in all major towns in Crete.

Loraine Wilson *Crete: The White Mountains* (Cicerone, UK). Thorough guide to fifty-plus hikes in the Lefká Óri by an experienced trekker ranging between 3km and 20km, and enabling routes to be linked for extended treks over several days.

Food and drink

Geoff Adams *Greek Wines* (Winemaster Publishing, UK, Ⓦwww.greekwinebook.com). Despite being overdue for an update, this is a well-researched *vade mecum* to the world of Greek wine. Includes detail on wine-growing regions (including Crete), grape varieties, wine producers and individual ratings for over 450 wines.

Miles Lambert-Gócs *The Wines of Greece* (Faber & Faber, UK). Comprehensive survey of the emerging wines of Greece with plenty of fascinating historical detail; a chapter is devoted to Cretan wines. Now in need of an update.

Konstantinos Lazarakis *The Wines of Greece* (Mitchell Beazley, UK). More up to date than the Adams and Lambert-Gócs works (above), this is a comprehensive survey of the rapidly changing Greek wine world detailing what's new and where to find the rising stars.

María and Níkos Psilakis *Cretan Cooking* (Karmanor, Iráklion). Long overdue and highly recommended guide to the Cretan kitchen – if only these dishes were generally available in the island's tavernas. The authors have gathered recipes from all parts of the island and interspersed with them illustrations not only of the food but of rural life past and present. Widely available on the island.

George Sfikas *Fishes of Greece* (Efstathiadis, Athens). Handy pictorial guide to all the fish you're likely to encounter in the island's tavernas. Widely available in Crete.

Sofia Souli *The Greek Cookery Book* (Toubi's, Athens). Good book to start you cooking Greek food when you get back home. Everything from *tzatzíki* to *kataífi*, including a few Cretan specialities. Profusely illustrated and widely available on the island.

Cretan music

Your first encounter with traditional Cretan music is likely to be in a taverna or back-street *kafenío*, where a couple of put-upon youths churn out the strains of *Zorba*, or on an organized "Cretan folk evening" offered by travel agents across the island. You can also strike lucky and witness genuinely excellent music and dance. Either way, if your interest is piqued, you'll often find the real thing by visiting local festivals or joining guests at one of the hundreds of wedding feasts taking place across the island throughout the summer where musicians are an essential feature. Alternatively, in major towns like Haniá and Réthimnon there are cafés such as *Café Kriti* (see p.315) and *O Gounakis* (see p.245), where skilled performers can deliver unforgettable performances.

The **musical tradition** of Crete is one of the most active and vibrant in Europe. Sadly, outside Greece it gets little attention or recognition, and equally frustratingly little is known about the history and origins of the music itself. In the island's early history we do know that the **Minoans** were great practitioners of the vocal and musical arts, and the Ayía Triádha sarcophagus (see p.96) depicts a flute-player as well as a minstrel with a seven-stringed lyre. Evidence of cymbals, *sistrum* (a sort of maraca) and even bagpipes have all been discovered in excavations across the island, but anything demonstrably Minoan in Crete's later musical development is impossible to discern.

Subsequent **influences** would seem to be those of the Dorian Greeks who dominated the island in the early first millennium BC and the Romans, Byzantines, Venetians and Ottoman Turks who came after them. Here again, what is known is frustratingly limited, although during the Greek period Crete introduced to the mainland the **paean**, a solemn hymn to the god Apollo performed to the accompaniment of lyres and flutes as well as the **nomos**, a solo hymn with lyre accompaniment to the same god first performed at Delphi by Chrysothemis the Cretan. During the same period the music of lyres and flutes accompanied Cretan armies into battle.

The problems encountered by ethnomusicologists in searching for influences on Cretan music over the centuries have not been confined to ancient music – in fact, there's virtually nothing to go on prior to the first recordings made in the twentieth century. What we now refer to as Cretan music belongs squarely in the **Eastern Mediterranean** family of modal musical traditions and has noticeable foreign traits with other traditions of the region such as Arabic, Turkish and, of course, the music of other regions of Greece. The principal instruments in use today are the **lyra**: a small three-stringed, pear-shaped fiddle held upright on the left knee and bowed horizontally with a bow (which in earlier times had bells on it) held in the right hand, and the **laoúto**: a large lute closely related to the Arabic *oud* with four courses of double strings made of steel, and movable frets made of nylon filament. One of the interesting aspects of the *lyra* has to do with the fingering technique of the left hand. Unlike the violin and most other related instruments, the strings are not pressed by the fingertips of the left hand, rather they are merely touched lightly from the side by the back of the nails. In this respect, the Cretan *lyra* resembles other *lyra* types found in the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan regions such as the Turkish *fasil kemence*, the Bulgarian *Gadulka*, as well as the *lyras* of the Dodecanese islands, southwest Turkey, Thrace, Macedonia, certain regions of southern Italy, and much of former Yugoslavia. Interestingly, this playing technique is also common to the bowed instruments of northwest India and Central Asia – although nowhere in the intermediate region between these distant lands is this technique encountered.

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△ Posters advertising local concerts, Mirtía

Numerous other instruments also have a place in Cretan music. In the far western as well as the far eastern regions of the island the **violin** is probably more common than the *lyra*. Indeed, in western Crete, a heated debate has arisen in recent decades concerning which instrument of the two is a more authentic vehicle for Cretan music. Unfortunately, this discrepancy is the result of a now obsolete ban imposed on violin-players by the state radio in the 1950s at the instigation of a researcher named **Simonas Karras**. Karras himself was under the sway of extreme nationalist ideologies, and regarded the violin as a European imposition which simply supplanted the "native" *lyra* in certain regions. In fact, neither instrument is truly indigenous to Crete (the oldest recorded presence of the *lyra* dates to tenth-century Thrace, and it only appeared in Crete as late as the early eighteenth century). Prior to Karras's intervention, it had never occurred to *lyra*-players and violin-players to look upon one another with animosity.

In the mountainous areas of central Crete a small bagpipe known as **askomandoura** (a possible descendent of the Minoan instrument) was at one time commonly found, and in the urban centers, a small long-necked lute similar to the **saz** called **boulgari** was prevalent. In the eastern regions around the Sitía area a small double-faced barrel-drum known as **daoulaki** was the main instrument accompanying the *lyra*. The **askomandoura**, **boulgari**, **daoulaki** and **sfyrohabiolo** (a small flute) are all very near to extinction, although in recent years some young musicians have taken them up, and a revival of interest in these instruments seems very likely.

Although it's been present on Crete even before Ottoman times, in the last couple of decades the **mandolin** has gained considerable popularity as an instrument to accompany the characteristic fifteen-syllable rhyming verses know as **mantinades** (from the Venetian *matinata* – evening love song). Often a group of people will sit together and engage in something between a dialogue and a competition of *mantinades*, to the accompaniment of a mandolin playing repetitive phrases known as **kontylies**, which allow considerable freedom for the singers.

Another instrument which has become popular as an accompaniment to the *lyra* in recent decades is the **guitar**. This is in many ways unfortunate, given that the guitar, with its chordal mentality, necessarily imposes western tempered tonality on an otherwise modal tradition in which microtonal intervals were once one of its central features. The contemporary accompaniment to the *lyra* (which is usually one *laoúto* and one guitar) has entirely negated the use of microtones by *lyra*-players who are now obliged to adapt to the tempered intervals of the guitar and *laoúto* (whose movable frets no longer move).

Most of the music of Crete, however, is **dance music**, which is played at local festivals (*panigyria*), weddings, baptisms and other such festive occasions. These dances are usually quite fast and require considerable skill but also restraint and finesse on the part of the dancer. The main dances are the **Malevyziotikos**, the **Pentozali** (slow and fast), the **Sousta**, and the **Syrtos**. Other dances do exist, but for the most part they're subcategories of those already mentioned.

The remainder of the Cretan repertoire is comprises songs that are not intended as accompaniment to dance. Perhaps the most important of these songs are those referred to by the generic name **rizitika**. These songs were originally sung exclusively on western Crete, without the accompaniment of instruments, by a group of men sitting around a table. For this reason they are also known as **traghoudia tis tavlas**, literally "table songs". *Rizitika* (sing. *rizitiko*) songs are characterized by their very serious, austere nature, their remarkable verses which reflect a very developed poetic tradition (frequently allegoric and obscure in meaning), as well as by their intricate melodies. The **rizitika** songs are also the only texts found in Cretan music that don't employ the technique of rhyming verses. Rhyming verses were introduced to Crete during the time of the Venetian occupation (1204–1669), and some researchers suggest that the unrhymed *rizitiko* lyrics perhaps reflect an older poetic form and that, potentially, some of the extant lyrics themselves could perhaps pre-date this time. There is a case for suggesting connections between the *rizitika* songs and Greek Orthodox church hymnology.

Other song-types are those found in urban centres and ports which reflect clearly influences originating from Asia Minor. Also worthy of special note

Cretan musicians

Once you get to the beginning of the twentieth century, there's no shortage of recorded traditional music. Type "Cretan music" into any Internet search engine, and you'll be spoilt for choice. Listening to the older recordings by players of the early twentieth century, it's immediately apparent that Cretan music has undergone major changes during the ensuing decades. Some great masters of the past include:

Andreas Rodinos Legendary *lyra*-player whose renditions of Cretan music are still today *the* point of reference. He died in 1937 aged only 22.

Manolis Lagos A very "classical" *lyra*-player from Réthimnon, who was active in the early twentieth century.

Giorgos Tzimakis *Lyra*-player and excellent singer from Haniá, who today is still playing in his mid-nineties.

Nikolaos Saridakis A very sensitive violin-player from Kissámos in the far west.

Stelios Foustalierakis The greatest exponent of the rare *saz*-like instrument the *boulgari*; he's also the composer of some of the greatest classics of Cretan music.

Giannis Bernidakis or **"Baxevanis"** The foremost singer and *laoúto*-player of the early twentieth century.

Kostas Mountakis One of the greatest *lyra*-players of the twentieth century, and an extraordinary singer; he was also the teacher of Ross Daly (see box on p.113).

Athanasios Skordalos A superb *lyra*-player from Spíli in central Crete. The friendly forty-year rivalry between Skordalos and Mountakis accounts for a large percentage of the creative work done in Cretan music during the second half of the twentieth century.

Michalis Papadakis or "**Plakianos"** The finest representative of the school of *lyra*-playing from the Apokoronas region; unfortunately, recordings are rare.

Nikos Xylouris Generally regarded as the greatest Cretan singer ever (and also a very fine *lyra*-player and composer), Xylouris was tragically struck down by cancer in 1980 while still in his forties.

Giannis Dermitzogiannis A *lyra*- and violin-player from Sitía, Dermitzogiannis was especially adept in the use of bells on the bow of the *lyra*.

Leonidas Klados A very innovative and creative *lyra*-player from the Messará region, and still active today.

are the melodies used to accompany the epic poem **Erotokritos**, which was written in the mid-seventeenth century by **Vitsentzos Kornaros**. This enormous epic poem holds a revered place in Cretan culture; until relatively recent times it was not unusual for even an illiterate person to know it in its entirety by memory.

Discography

Leonidas Klados & Manolis Kaklis *Pantermo Rethemnos* (Panivar). A *lyra*-player of the older generation, Klados is still very active today and is renowned for his highly refined sound and brilliant improvisations. Here he accompanies Manolis Kaklis, an outstanding singer of Cretan music.

Kostas Mountakis *Rare Recordings* (Seistron/MBI). A four-CD collection of live recordings by perhaps the greatest *lyra*-player in recorded history; this collection is absolutely essential for anyone seriously interested in Cretan music.

Stelios Petrakis *Oi dikoi mou filoi* (Seistron/MBI). An exceptional recording made by the young Sitían *lyra*-, *laouto*- and *saz*-player with Iranian percussionist Bijan Chemirani. One of the very best of the new projects coming out of Crete.

Protomastores *Kritiko mousiko Ergastiri* (Aerakis). A ten-CD anthology of recordings made between 1920 and 1955, including almost all of the great players of the period – the most important sound record of the twentieth century's greatest Cretan musicians.

Psarantonis *Anastorimata* (Seistron). Another formidable performer on the *lyra* demonstrates his talents on this CD.

Athanasios Skordalos *Kriti Patris tou Minoa* (Aerakis). Skordalos was an exceptional *lyra*-player and a prolific composer especially adept at the *syrtos* form. This instrumental CD highlights the best aspects of his playing.

Nikos Xylouris *Dimotiki Anthologia* (Columbia/EMI). Early recordings by one of Crete's legendary and much lamented singers and performers.

Most of the above recordings can be obtained from Cretashop in Iráklion (Ⓦwww.cretashop.gr/br).

Language

Language

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Language

So many Cretans have been compelled by poverty and other circumstances to work abroad, especially in the English-speaking world, that you'll find someone who speaks some English in almost every village. Add to that the thousands attending language schools or working in the tourist industry – English is the lingua franca of the north coast – and it's easy to see how so many visitors come back having learnt only half-a-dozen restaurant words between them. You can certainly get by this way, even in quite out-of-the-way places, but it isn't very satisfying.

Learning Greek, phrasebooks and Greek dictionaries

Breakthrough Greek (Pan Macmillan; book and two cassettes). First-rate, basic teach-yourself course – completely outclasses the competition. Now hard to find and in need of a new edition.

Get By in Greek (BBC Publications, UK; book and two cassettes). One of the BBC's excellent crash-course introductions which gets you to survival-level Greek (bars, tavernas, asking the way) in a couple of weeks.

Greek in Three Months (Nikki Watts; Hugo, Dorling Kindersley; book & four cassettes). Thorough guide to beginner's Greek and – given commitment – delivers as promised. Good substitute for *Breakthrough Greek*.

Greek Language and People (BBC Publications, UK; book and CD available). An in-depth study course which, whilst more limited than the *Breakthrough* course in scope, is good for acquiring the essentials and gets you using the Greek alphabet from the start.

A Manual of Modern Greek (Anne Farmakides; Yale; McGill; three vols). If you have the discipline and motivation, this is one of the best courses for learning proper, grammatical Greek; indeed, mastery of just the first volume will get you a long way.

Teach Yourself Instant Greek (Elisabeth Smith; Hodder & Stoughton; NTC/Contemporary Publishing). Claims to be able to get you speaking Greek in six weeks if you devote 45 minutes per day to study. Quite well structured, with optional tapes, and should enable you to get results if you stick at it.

Phrasebooks

The Rough Guide to Greek (Rough Guides). Practical and easy-to-use, the Rough Guide phrasebook allows you to speak the way you would in your own language. Feature boxes fill you in on dos and don'ts and cultural know-how.

Dictionaries

The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Greek (Oxford UP). A bit bulky but generally considered the best Greek–English, English–Greek dictionary.

Collins Pocket Greek Dictionary (HarperCollins). Very nearly as complete as the Oxford and probably better value for money. The *Collins Gem* Greek Dictionary (UK only) is a palm-sized version and the best day-pack choice.

Oxford Learner's Dictionary (Oxford UP). If you're planning a prolonged stay, this pricey two-volume set is unbeatable for usage and vocabulary. There's also a more portable one-volume *Learner's Pocket Dictionary*.

Greek is not an easy language for English-speakers, but it is a beautiful one, and even a brief acquaintance will give you some idea of the debt western European languages owe to it. More important than that, the willingness and ability to say even a few words will transform your status from that of dumb *tourístas* to the honourable one of *kséno*, a word which can mean stranger, traveller and guest all rolled into one.

On top of the usual difficulties of learning a new language, Greek presents the added problem of an entirely separate **alphabet**. Despite initial appearances, this is in practice fairly easily mastered and is a skill that will help enormously if you are going to get around independently (see the alphabet and transliteration box on p.478). In addition, certain combinations of letters have unexpected results. This book's transliteration system should help you make intelligible noises but you have to remember that the correct **stress** – marked in the book with an accent – is absolutely crucial. With the right sounds but the wrong stress people will either fail to understand you, or else understand something quite different from what you intended.

Greek **grammar** is more complicated still: nouns are divided into three genders, all with different case endings in the singular and in the plural, and all adjectives and articles have to agree with these in gender, number and case. (All adjectives are arbitrarily cited in the neuter form in the following lists.) Verbs are even worse. To begin with at least, the best thing is simply to say what you know the way you know it, and never mind the niceties. "Eat meat hungry" should get a result, however grammatically incorrect. If you worry about your mistakes, you'll never say anything.

Greek words and phrases

Essentials

yes	né
certainly	málista
no	óhi
please	parakaló
okay, agreed	endáksi
Thank you (very much)	Efharistó (polí)
I (don't) understand	(Dhen) katalavéno
Excuse me, do you speak English?	Parakaló, mípos miláte angliká?
Sorry/excuse me	Signómi
today	símera
tomorrow	ávrio
big	megálo
small	mikró
more	perisótero
less	ligótero
a little	lígo
a lot	polí
cheap	ftinó
expensive	akrivó
hot	zestó
cold	krío
with	mazí
without	horís
quickly	grígora
slowly	sigá
Mr/Mrs	Kírios/Kiría
Miss	Dhespinís

Other needs

to eat/drink	trógo/píno
bakery	foúrnos, psomádhiko
pharmacy	farmakío
post office	tahidhromío
stamps	gramatósima
petrol station	venzinádhiko

bank	trápeza
money	leftá/hrímata
toilet	toualéta

police	astinomía
doctor	iatrós
hospital	nosokomío

Requests and questions

To ask a question, it's simplest to start with *parakaló*, then name the thing you want in an interrogative tone.

Where is the bakery?	Parakaló, o foúrnos?
Can you show me the road to…?	Parakaló, o dhrómos ya…?
We'd like a room	Parakaló, éna dhomátio
for two	ya dhío átoma?
May I have a kilo of oranges?	Parakaló, éna kiló portokália?
where?	pou?
how?	pos?
how many?	póssi/pósses?

how much?	póso?
when?	póte?
why?	yatí?
at what time…?	ti óra…?
what is/which is…?	ti íne/pió íne..?
how much (does it cost)?	póso káni?
What time does it open?	Tí óra aníyi?
What time does it close?	Tí óra klíni?

Talking to people

Greek makes the distinction between the informal (*esí*) and formal (*esís*) second person, as French does with *tu* and *vous*. Young people, older people and country people nearly always use *esí* even with total strangers. In any event, no one will be too bothered if you get it wrong. By far the most common greeting, on meeting and parting, is *yá sou/yá sas* – literally "health to you".

Hello	Hérete
Good morning	Kalí méra
Good evening	Kalí spéra
Goodnight	Kalí níkhta
Goodbye	Adhío
How are you?	Ti kánis/ti kánete?
I'm fine	Kalá íme
And you?	Ke esís?
What's your name?	Pos se léne?
My name is…	Me léne...

Speak slower, please	Parakaló, miláte pió sigá
How do you say it in Greek?	Pos léyete sta Eliniká?
I don't know	Dhen kséro
See you tomorrow	Tha se dho ávrio
See you soon	Kalí andhámosi
Let's go	Páme
Please help me	Parakaló, na me voithíste

Greek's Greek

There are numerous words and phrases which you will hear constantly, even if you rarely have the chance to use them. These are a few of the most common.

Éla!	Come (literally), but also Speak to me! You don't say! etc.
Oríste?	What can I do for you?
Bros!	Standard phone response
Ti néa?	What's new?

Ti yínete?	What's going on (here)?
Étsi k'étsi	So-so
Ópa!	Whoops! Watch it!
Po-po-po!	Expression of dismay or concern, like French "O la la!"

Pedhí mou	My boy/girl, sonny, friend, etc.
Maláka(s)	Literally "wanker", but often used (don't try it!) as an informal address
Sigá sigá	Take your time, slow down
Kaló taxídhi	Bon voyage

Accommodation

hotel	ksenodhohío
a room	éna dhomátio
for one/two/ three people	ya éna/dhío/tría átoma
for one/two/ three nights	ya mía/dhío/trís vradhiés
with a double bed	me megálo kreváti
with a shower	me doús
hot water	zestó neró
cold water	krío neró
Can I see it?	Boró na to dho?
Can we camp here?	Boróume na váloume ti skiní edhó?
campsite	kamping/kataskínosi
tent	skiní
youth hostel	ksenodhohío neótitos

On the move

airplane	aeropláno
bus	leoforío
car	aftokínito
motorbike, moped	mihanáki, papáki
taxi	taksí
ship	plío/vapóri/karávi
bicycle	podhílato
hitching	otostóp
on foot	me ta pódhia
trail	monopáti
bus station	praktorío leoforíon
bus stop	stási
harbour	limáni
What time does it leave?	Ti óra févyi?
What time does it arrive?	Ti óra ftháni?
How many kilometres?	Pósa hiliómetra?
How many hours?	Pósses óres?
Where are you going?	Pou pas?
I'm going to…	Páo sto...
I want to get off at…	Thélo na katévo sto...
The road to…	O dhrómos ya...
near	kondá
far	makriá
left	aristerá
right	dheksiá
straight ahead	katefthía
a ticket to…	éna isistírio ya...
a return ticket	éna isistírio me epistrofí
beach	paralía
cave	spiliá
centre (of town)	kéndro
church	eklissía
sea	thálassa
village	horió

Numbers

1	énos éna/mía
2	dhío
3	trís/tría
4	tésseres/téssera
5	pénde
6	éksi
7	eftá
8	okhtó
9	enyá
10	dhéka
11	éndheka
12	dhódheka
13	dhekatrís
14	dhekatésseres
20	íkosi
21	íkosi éna
30	riánda
40	saránda

50	penínda
60	eksínda
70	evdhomínda
80	ogdhónda
90	enenínda
100	ekató
150	ekatón penínda

200	dhiakóssies/ia
500	pendakóssies/ia
1000	hílies/ia
2000	dhío hiliádhes
1,000,000	éna ekatomírio
first	próto
second	dhéftero
third	tríto

The time and days of the week

Sunday	Kiriakí
Monday	Dheftéra
Tuesday	Tríti
Wednesday	Tetárti
Thursday	Pémpti
Friday	Paraskeví
Saturday	Sávato

What time is it?	Ti óra íne?
One/two/three o'clock	Mía/dhío/trís óra/óres
Twenty to four	Tésseres pará íkosi
Five past seven	Eftá ke pénde
Half past eleven	Éndheka ke misí
half-hour	misí óra
quarter-hour	éna tétarto

Months and seasonal terms

NB: You may see *katharévoussa*, or hybrid, forms of the months written on schedules or street signs; these are the spoken demotic forms.

January	Yennáris
February	Fleváris
March	Mártis
April	Aprílis
May	Maïos
June	Ioúnios
July	Ioúlios

August	Ávgoustos
September	Septémvris
October	Októvrios
November	Noémvris
December	Dhekémvris
summer schedule	Therinó dhromolóyio
winter schedule	Himerinó dhromolóyio

A food and drink glossary

Basics

neró	water
psomí	bread
olikís aleseos	whole grain
siskalísio psomi	rye bread
aláti	salt
yiaoúrti	yoghurt
méli	honey
kréas	meat
psári(a)	fish

lahaniká	vegetables
fitofágos	vegetarian/*hortofágos*
avgá	eggs
tirí	cheese
(horís) ládhi	(without) oil
katálogo/lísta	menu
o logariasmós	the bill
sto foúrno	baked
psitó	roasted
sti soúvla	spit roasted
tis óras	grilled/fried to order

Minoan diet

Like today's islanders, the Minoans ate the wild plants and herbs that grow in the hills and mountains (known by modern Cretans as *hórta*) as well as a variety of grains and pulses. Lovers of seafood, they also fished the seas around the island's coast for many of the varieties familiar to modern diners in the island's tavernas: *tsipoúra*, *sargós* and *fangrí* (types of bream) plus *safriós* (mackerel), *okhtapódi* (octopus) and *achinosalata* (sea urchins' eggs). Evidence of remains found at many Minoan sites indicate that lobster, crab, oyster, whelks and mussels were also highly regarded. The Minoans' favourite meats (again as today) were sheep and goat and the Cretan passion for *tsalingaria* or *cochlí* (snails) was just as strong three and a half thousand years ago. Duck and partridge were also eaten, although chicken (and their eggs) were unknown in Minoan times. The olive was introduced in the Neolithic period and the great *pithoi* oil containers found in the Minoan palaces testify to the importance of oil at all levels of society. The Minoans were probably just as choosy about their olive oil as islanders today and each region – as now – was no doubt renowned for its subtle differences in taste and quality. Almonds, figs, pears, plums and pomegranates were the Minoans' preferred fruits and their bread – cooked on flat dishes using flour with little gluten (raising agent) – would be instantly recognizable to a modern Cretan as the flat pita, today a staple throughout Greece. Honey was the main source of sugar in Minoan times and no doubt *thimarisio* (thyme honey) was as popular then as now. The Minoans were also enthusiastic wine drinkers: a four-thousand-year-old winepress discovered at Vathípetro (p.112), at the centre of a still-working vineyard, has a fair claim to being the oldest in the world.

Soups and starters

soúpa	soup
avgolémono	egg and lemon soup
dákos	barley rusks soaked in oil and tomato, often sprinkled with cheese and oregano
dolmádhes	stuffed vine leaves
fasoládha	bean soup
fáva	purée of split peas with onion
saganáki	fried cheese
taramósalata	fish roe paté
tzatzíki	yoghurt and cucumber dip
melitzanosaláta	aubergine/eggplant dip

Vegetables

patátes	potatoes
hórta	greens (usually wild)
radhíkia	wild chicory
piperiés	peppers
domátes	tomatoes
fasolákia	string beans
angoúri	cucumber
anginári**es**	artichokes
yígandes	white haricot beans
koukiá	broad beans
melitzána	aubergine/eggplant
kolokithákia	courgette/zucchini
spanáki	spinach
fakés	lentils
rízi/piláfi	rice (usually with *sáltsa* – sauce)
saláta	salad
horiátiki (saláta)	greek salad (with olives, feta etc)
yemistés	stuffed vegetables
papoutsákia	stuffed aubergine/eggplant
bouréki	courgette/zucchini, potato or cheese pie

Meat

kotópoulo	chicken
arní	lamb
hirinó	pork

vodhinó	beef
moskhári	veal
sikóti	liver
patsás	tripe soup
nefrá	kidneys
biftéki	hamburger

Meat-based dishes

moussaká	aubergine/eggplant, potato and mince pie
stifádho	meat stew with tomato and onion
kleftiko	meat, potatoes and veg cooked together in a pot or foil; a Cretan speciality traditionally carried to bandits in hiding
pastítsio	macaroni baked with meat
paϊdhákia	lamb chops
brizóla	pork or beef chop
keftédhes	meatballs
loukánika	spicy sausages
kokorétsi	liver/offal kebab
tsalingária	garden snails

Fish and seafood

ahini	sea urchins
gávros	anchovy
garídhes	prawns
okhtapódhi	octopus
astakós	lobster
kalamária	squid
kalamarákia	baby squid
glóssa	sole
barbóuni	red mullet
xifias	swordfish
sinagrídha	dentex
soupiá	cuttlefish
marídhes	whitebait
gópa	bogue (cheap!)
fagrí/tsipoúra	sea bream
melanoúri	saddled bream
sargós	white bream

Sweets, fruit and cheese

karidhópita	walnut cake
baklavá	honey and nut pastry
rizógalo	rice pudding
galaktobóuriko	custard pie
pagotó	ice cream
pastéli	sesame and honey bar
kasséri	hard cheese
graviéra	gruyère-type cheese
mizíthra	soft ricotta-style cheese
fráoules	strawberries
kerásia	cherries
stafília	grapes
pobrtokália	oranges
pepóni	melon
karpoúzi	watermelon
míla	apples
síka	(dried) figs
fistíkia	pistachio nuts

Drinks

neró metalikó	mineral water
bíra	beer
gála	milk
krasí	wine
mávro/kókkino	red
áspro	white
rosé/kokkinéli	rosé
tsikoudia/ráki	grappa-style firewater
oúzo	distilled grape spirit
tsáï	tea
kafé	coffee
gálakakáo	chocolate milk
portokaládha	orangeade
limonádha	lemonade
gabzóza	generic fizzy drink
boukáli	bottle
potíri	glass
Stiniyássas!	Cheers!
Yiásou!	Cheers!

The Greek alphabet: transliteration

Set out below is the Greek alphabet, the system of transliteration used in this book and a brief aid to pronunciation.

Greek	Transliteration	Pronounced
Α, α	a	a as in f*a*ther
Β, β	v	b as in *v*et
Γ, γ	y/g	y as in yes when before an e or i; when before consonants or a, o or ou it’s a breathy, throaty g as in *gasp*
Δ, δ	dh	th as in *th*en
Ε, ε	e	e as in *get*
Ζ, ζ	z	z sound
Η, η	i	ee sound as in f*eet*
Θ, θ	th	th as in *th*eme
Ι, ι	i	i as in b*i*t
Κ, κ	k	k sound
Λ, λ	l	l sound
Μ, μ	m	m sound
Ν, ν	n	n sound
Ξ, ξ	ks	ks sound
Ο, ο	o	o as in t*oa*d
Π, π	p	p sound
Ρ, ρ	r	rolled r sound
Σ, σ, ς	s	s sound
Τ, τ	t	t sound
Υ, υ	i	ee, indistinguishable from η
Φ, φ	f	f sound
Χ, χ	h	harsh h sound, like ch in lo*ch*
Ψ,ψ	ps	ps as in li*ps*
Ω, ω	o	o as in t*oa*d, indistinguishable from ο

Combinations and diphthongs

ΑΙ, αι	e	e as in get
ΑΥ, αυ	av/af	av or af depending on following consonant
ΕΙ, ει	i	ee, exactly like η
ΟΙ, οι	i	ee, identical again
ΕΥ, ευ	ev/ef	ev or ef depending on following consonant
ΟΥ, ου	ou	ou as in t*ou*rist
ΓΓ, γγ	ng	ng as in *ang*ie
ΓΚ, γκ	g/ng	g as in *g*oat at the beginning of a word, ng in the middle
ΜΠ, μπ	b	b at the beginning of a word, mb in the middle
ΝΤ, ντ	d/nd	d at the beginning of a word, nd in the middle
ΤΣ, τσ	ts	ts as in hi*ts*
ΣΙ, σι	sh	sh as in *sh*ame
ΤΖ, τζ	ts	j as in *j*am

Note: An umlaut on a letter indicates that the two vowels are pronounced separately; for example Aóös is Ah-oh-s, rather than A-ooos.

Glossary

ACROPOLIS Ancient, fortified hilltop.

AGORA Market and meeting place of an ancient city.

AMPHORA Tall, narrow-necked jar for oil or wine.

ÁNO Upper, as in upper town or village; eg Áno Zákros.

APSE Curved recess at the altar end of a church.

ARCHAIC PERIOD Late Iron Age from around 750 BC to the start of the Classical period in the fifth century BC.

ARSENALI Arsenals – a term used rather loosely for many Venetian defensive and harbour works.

ASKLEPION Sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, where the sick sought cures for their ailments.

ATRIUM Central altar-court of a Roman house.

ÁYIOS/AYÍA/ÁYII Saint or holy (m/f/pl), common place-name prefix (abbrev. Ag. or Ay.): Áyios Nikólaos is St Nicholas; Ayía Triádha is the Holy Trinity.

BASILICA Colonnaded "hall-type" church.

BYZANTINE EMPIRE Created by the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, this was the eastern half, ruled from Byzantium or Constantinople (modern Istanbul). There are many Byzantine churches of the fifth to the twelfth century on Crete, and Byzantine art flourished again after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, under Venetian rule, when many artists and scholars fled to the island.

CENTRAL COURT Paved area at the heart of a Minoan palace.

CLASSICAL PERIOD Essentially from the end of the Persian Wars in the fifth century BC to the unification of Greece under Philip II of Macedon (338 BC).

DHIMARHÍO Town hall (modern usage).

DHOMÁTIA Rooms for rent in private houses.

DORIAN Civilization which overran the Mycenaeans from the north around 1100 BC, and became their successor throughout much of southern Greece, including Crete.

EPARHÍA Greek Orthodox diocese, also the smallest subdivision of a modern province.

ETEO-CRETAN Literally true Cretan, the Eteo-Cretans are believed to have been remnants of the Minoan people who kept a degree of their language and culture alive in isolated centres in eastern Crete as late as the third century BC.

GEOMETRIC PERIOD Post-Mycenaean Iron Age, named for the style of its pottery: beginnings are in the early eleventh century BC with the arrival of Dorian peoples – by the eighth, with the development of representational styles, it becomes known as the Archaic period.

HELLENISTIC PERIOD The last and most unified Greek empire, created by Philip II and Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC, finally collapsing with the fall of Corinth to the Romans in 146 BC.

HÓRA Main town of a region; literally it means "the place".

IKONOSTÁSIS Screen between the nave of a church and the altar, often covered in icons.

IPNÁKOS Greek version of the siesta, which is widely practised in Crete, especially during the hot summer months. It usually lasts from around 1.30pm to 5.30pm. Many larger stores and businesses close during these hours.

JANISSARY Member of the Turkish Imperial Guard: in Crete under the Turks a much-feared mercenary force, often forcibly recruited from the local population.

KAFENÍO Coffeehouse/café: in a small village the centre of communal life and probably the bus stop, too.

KAÏKI A caïque, or medium-sized boat, traditionally wooden. Now used for just about any coast-hopping or excursion boat.

KÁMBOS Fertile agricultural plateau, usually near the mouth of a river.

KAPETÁNIOS Widely used term of honour for a man of local power – originally for guerrilla leaders who earned the title through acts of particular bravado.

KÁSTRO Medieval castle or any fortified hill.

KÁTO Lower, as in lower town or village; eg Káto Zákros.

KERNOS Ancient cult vessel or altar with a number of receptacles for offerings.

KRATER Large, two-handled wine bowl.

LÁRNAKES Minoan clay coffins.

LUSTRAL BASIN A small sunken chamber in Minoan palaces reached by steps: perhaps actually some kind of bath but more likely for purely ritual purification.

MEGARON Principal hall of a Mycenaean palace.

MELTÉMI North wind that blows across the Aegean in summer and can be vicious in Crete. Its force is gauged by what it knocks over – "tableweather", "chairweather" etc.

MINOAN Crete's great Bronze Age civilization which dominated the Aegean from about 2500 to 1400 BC.

MONÍ Monastery or convent.

MYCENAEAN Mainland civilization centred on Mycenae ca.1700–1100 BC: some claim they were responsible for the destruction of the Minoans, and certainly Mycenaean influence pervaded Crete in the late and post-Minoan periods.

NEOLITHIC The earliest era of settlement in Crete, characterized by the use of stone tools and weapons together with basic agriculture.

NÉOS, NÉA, NÉO New.

NOMÓS Modern Greek province: Crete is divided into four.

ODEION Small amphitheatre used for performances or meetings.

PALEÓS, PALEÁ, PALEÓ Old.

PALLIKÁRI Literally "brave man": in Crete a guerrilla fighter, particularly in the struggle for independence from the Turks, also a general term for a tough young man.

PANAYÍA The Virgin Mary.

PANIYÍRI Festival or feast, the local celebration of a holy day.

PANTOKRÁTOR Literally "The Almighty", a stern figure of Christ or God the Father frescoed or in mosaic on the dome of many Byzantine churches.

PARALÍA Seafront promenade.

PEAK SANCTUARY Mountain-top shrine, often in or associated with a cave, sometimes in continuous use from Neolithic through to Roman times.

PERÍPTERO Street kiosk.

PERISTYLE Colonnade or area surrounded by colonnade, used especially of Minoan halls or courtyards.

PÍTHOS (pl. PÍTHOI) Large ceramic jar for storing oil, grain etc, very common in the Minoan palaces and used in almost identical form in modern Cretan homes.

PLATÍA Square or plaza. "Kentrikí Platía" means the main square.

PROPILEA Portico or entrance to an ancient building.

RHYTON Vessel, often horn-shaped, for pouring libations or offerings.

STELE Upright stone slab or column, usually inscribed.

STOA Colonnaded walkway in Classical-era marketplace.

THEATRAL AREA Open area found in most of the Minoan palaces with seat-like steps around. May have been a type of theatre or ritual area, but not conclusively proved.

THÓLOS Conical or beehive-shaped building, especially a Mycenaean tomb.

Acronyms

ANEK *Anonimí Navtikí Evería Krítis* (Shipping Company of Crete Ltd), which runs most ferries between Pireás and Crete, plus many to Italy.

ELTA The postal service.

EOS Greek Mountaineering Federation, based in Athens with branches in Haniá and Iráklion.

EOT *Ellinikós Organismós Tourismoú*, the National Tourist Organization.

KKE The Communist Party, unreconstructed.

KTEL National syndicate of bus companies. The term is also used to refer to bus stations.

ND *Néa Dhimokratía*, the Conservative and – following an election victory in 2004 – currently the government party led by Costas Karamanlis.

OSE Railway corporation.

OTE Telephone company.

PASOK Socialist party (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) currently led by Yiorgos Papandreou and the governing party for most of the last thirty years. Lost the general election of 2004.

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A Rough Guide to Rough Guides

Published in 1982, the first Rough Guide – to Greece – was a student scheme that became a publishing phenomenon. Mark Ellingham, a recent graduate in English from Bristol University, had been travelling in Greece the previous summer and couldn't find the right guidebook. With a small group of friends he wrote his own guide, combining a highly contemporary, journalistic style with a thoroughly practical approach to travellers' needs.

The immediate success of the book spawned a series that rapidly covered dozens of destinations. And, in addition to impecunious backpackers, Rough Guides soon acquired a much broader and older readership that relished the guides' wit and inquisitiveness as much as their enthusiastic, critical approach and value-for-money ethos.

These days, Rough Guides include recommendations from shoestring to luxury and cover more than 200 destinations around the globe, including almost every country in the Americas and Europe, more than half of Africa and most of Asia and Australasia. Our ever-growing team of authors and photographers is spread all over the world, particularly in Europe, the USA and Australia.

In the early 1990s, Rough Guides branched out of travel, with the publication of Rough Guides to World Music, Classical Music and the Internet. All three have become benchmark titles in their fields, spearheading the publication of a wide range of books under the Rough Guide name.

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Text editor: Alison Murchie, Nikki Birrell
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……

Editorial: **London** Kate Berens, Claire Saunders, Ruth Blackmore, Polly Thomas, Richard Lim, Karoline Densley, Andy Turner, Keith Drew, Edward Aves, Nikki Birrell, Alice Park, Sarah Eno, Lucy White, Jo Kirby, Samantha Cook, James Smart, Natasha Foges, Roisin Cameron, Joe Staines, Duncan Clark, Peter Buckley, Matthew Milton, Tracy Hopkins, Ruth Tidball; **New York** Andrew Rosenberg, Steven Horak, AnneLise Sorensen, Amy Hegarty, April Isaacs, Ella Steim, Anna Owens, Joseph Petta, Sean Mahoney
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The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in **The Rough Guide to Crete**, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Help us update

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that the seventh edition of **The Rough Guide to Crete** is accurate and up to date. However, things change – places get "discovered", opening hours are notoriously fickle, restaurants and rooms raise prices or lower standards. If you feel we've got it wrong or left something out, we'd like to know, and if you can remember the address, the price, the time, the phone number, so much the better. We'll credit all contributions, and send a copy of the next edition (or any other Rough Guide if you prefer) for the best letters. Everyone who writes to us and isn't already a subscriber will receive a copy of our full-colour thrice-yearly newsletter. Please mark letters: "**Rough Guide Crete Update**" and send to: Rough Guides, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, or Rough Guides, 4th Floor, 345 Hudson St, New York, NY 10014. Or send an email to **mail@roughguides.com**
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Things not to miss

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Ancient Crete colour section

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A mountainous island colour section

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Black & whites

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p.450 Leopard snake © Steve Taylor/Stone/Getty Images

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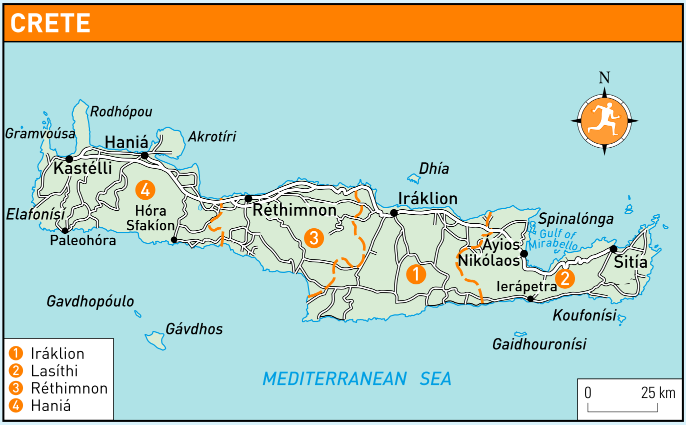
– – – –	Chapter division boundary
═	Major road
═	Minor road
= = = =	Tracks
—	Unpaved road
⋯	Road under construction
- - - -	Footpath
ǁǁǁǁ	Steps
▬▭▬	Railway
— — -	Ferry route
═	Waterway
≍	Bridge
⊓⊓⊓	Wall
♦	Point of intrest
⟋	Hill
▲	Mountains peak
^^	Mountains range
≋	Gorge
∪∪∪	Cliff
◓	Cave
⌂	Refuge
⛯	Lighthouse
✈	Airport
★	Bus/taxi stop
⛽	Fuel station
P	Parking
ⓘ	Information office
@	Internet access
✉	Post office
🏛	Monument
✿	Gardens
♜	Castle
∴	Archeological site
✡	Synagogue
🕌	Mosque
✝	Church
⛪	Monastery or convent
✚	Church
⬭	Stadium
■	Building
▨	Park
▒	Forest
░	Beach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Spinalónga
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Gaidhouronísi
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
① Iráklion
② Lasíthi
③ Réthimnon
④ Haniá
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About this book

Rough Guides are designed to be good to read and easy to use. The book is divided into the following sections and you should be able to find whatever you need in one of them.

The **colour section** is designed to give you a feel for Crete, suggesting when to go and what not to miss, and includes a full list of **contents**. Then comes **basics**, for pre-departure information and other practicalities.

The **guide** chapters cover Crete's regions in depth, each starting with a highlights panel, introduction and a map to help you plan your route.

The **contexts** section fills you in on history, wildlife, music and books, while individual **colour inserts** introduce ancient Crete and its mountains, and **language** gives you an extensive menu reader and enough Greek to get by.

The book concludes with all the **small print**, including details of how to send in updates and corrections, and a comprehensive **index**.

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The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in The Rough Guide to Crete, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.